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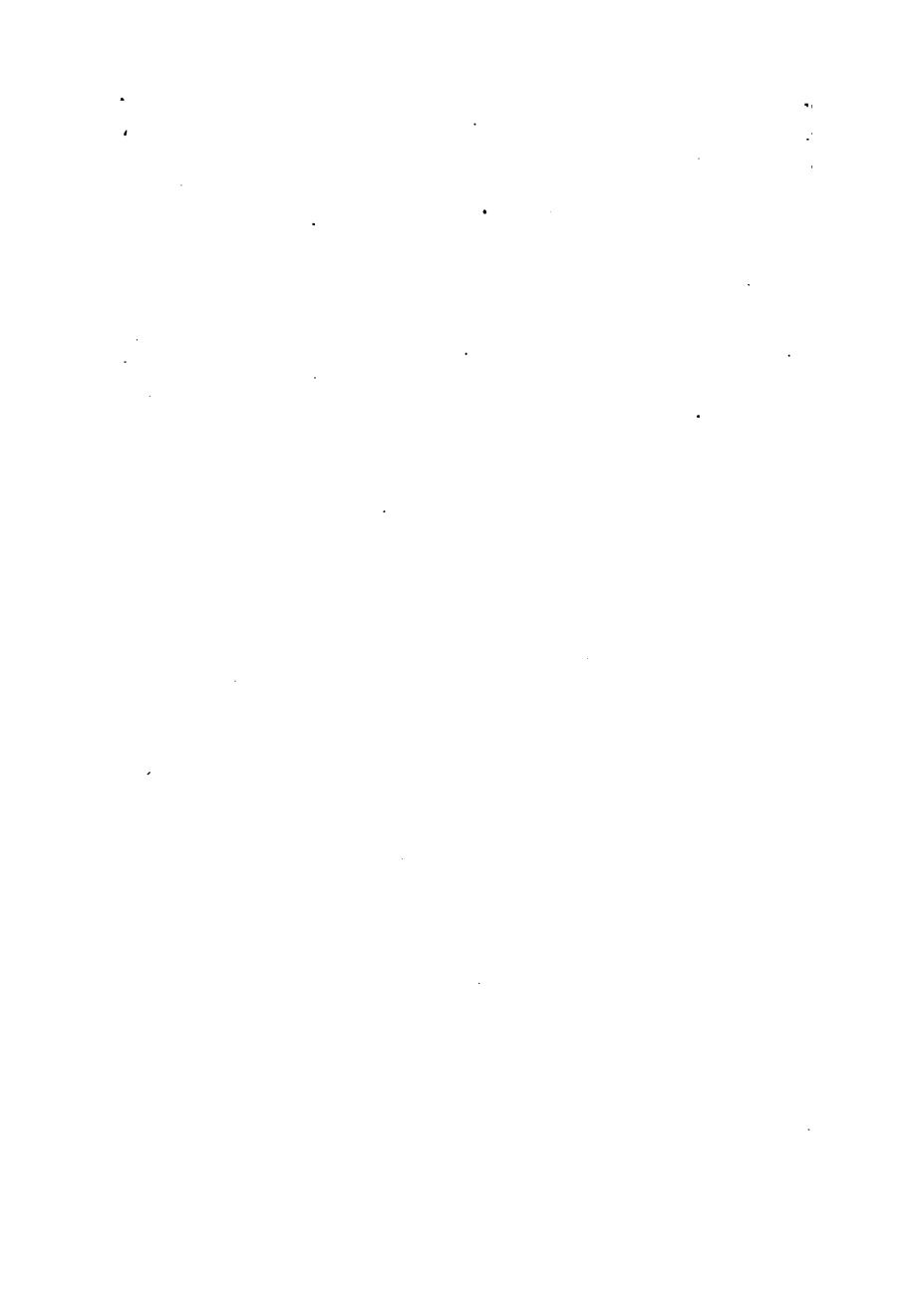
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**A POPULAR VIEW OF ATHEISM.**

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## PREFACE.

IF a sincere desire to preserve or rescue our fellow-creatures from fatal error, may be pleaded as an apology for writing and publishing a book, I am not destitute of apology, were any such necessary, for composing, and placing before the public, the following pages. I have endeavoured, throughout, to avoid prolixity. But the man who should contribute a single plank, or spar, to a life-boat, might be allowed to flatter himself, with having performed a humane and commendable action.

It is confidently asserted, that there are not less than half a million of persons, in this country, who have renounced all *religious belief*. Individuals of this description have, in several instances, of late, made themselves conspicuous; and obtained an unenviable publicity. I have often found myself in company with persons, who either denied, or discovered an inclination to deny, the existence of God. And such is the subtlety and sophistry of these persons—their craft in proposing objections, and their adroitness in urging them, that I have, now and then, felt it difficult to furnish a prompt refutation.

I wished to obtain some small treatise, on the *simple fact* of the Divine Existence, concise and comprehensive, argumentative and yet plain, that I could put into



SEELEYS, THAMES DITTON, SURREY.

**A POPULAR VIEW  
OF ATHEISM.**

3/

**BY JAMES DAVIES.**

**"There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,  
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy."** **SHAKESPEARE.**

**PUBLISHED BY R. B. SEELEY AND W. BURNSIDE:  
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MDCCCXXXV.**

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# A POPULAR VIEW

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## PREFACE.

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I wished to obtain some small treatise, on the *simple fact* of the Divine Existence, concise and comprehensive, argumentative and yet plain, that I could put into

the hand of an atheistical antagonist, to silence, if not to convince him ; but every effort to procure one, proved unsuccessful. Indeed, it occurred to me, that this was a subject of theology, which—although fundamental of all others—had been much neglected of late years ; and, that there existed a deficiency amongst the numerous treatises on this subject, yet to be supplied. I have therefore, attempted, in twelve, short, consecutive chapters, to supply this deficiency. How far I have succeeded, must be left to the judgment of the reader.

I am aware, that the present time is not the most auspicious that might have been selected, for publishing what I have written ; but, if I have executed my task with talents and learning unequal to others, who have recently pursued the same tracks of thought with myself, and have placed their observations, in splendid volumes, before the world, it should be borne in mind, that I have written with a different view, and for a different class of readers.

It is probable that a severely critical eye may discover manifold defects in what I have executed,—defects in the method, in the titles of the chapters, and the order in which they are arranged, in the construction of the arguments and the selection of the language : but, to any and every critic, who may condescend to read the following pages—be he friend or foe—and will point out to me, “a more excellent way,” in any of these respects, I promise—in the event of a second edition—to adopt his suggestions.

I commit this small volume to the benediction of *Him*, whom I have truly desired to serve, in preparing it ; and to the serious consideration of the persons, for whose highest benefit it is intended.

HAVERHILL,

*November, 1835.*

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## A POPULAR VIEW OF ATHEISM.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### THE ATHEISTICAL TENDENCY OF THE PRESENT TIMES.

1. WERE a number of desperadoes to make their appearance in a commonwealth, and, from dissatisfaction with an excellently established order of things, to become opposed to the Supreme Power—even to a denial of its existence,—to maintain, that all authority is tyranny, that all laws are arbitrary edicts,—expedients of the powerful to oppress the feeble—that all social order is an encroachment upon freedom, and that the only real and valuable liberty consists in an unrestrained licentiousness of purpose and practice; every person of intelligence would perceive, that the numerical increase of such persons, and the prevalence of their sentiments, must lead to anarchy throughout the state, inflict deep and permanent misery upon all classes of society, and entail utter ruin upon all the great interests of the country. Every patriotic man, however obscure his station, would hold himself pledged, in this emergency, to disabuse, to the extent of his ability, these infatuated persons, of their pernicious delusions; or, to counteract



their cruel machinations:—and, in proportion to his success, would be the amount of the actual benefit conferred upon the community.

2. In the commonwealth of religion and morals,—if the term may be thus applied,—persons of desperate sentiments occasionally arise, who would convulse and revolutionize the world; erase the very foundations of society; unsettle every thing and settle nothing; substitute, in every case, demonstration for probability, and sense for faith. These men assure us, that there is no Supreme First Cause—nor any Being in the universe superior to themselves—that all the multifarious forms of existence, and whatever order prevails throughout nature, have been from eternity, or are purely the result of chance, or originated in some unaccountable principle of matter; that religion is an abject superstition—the invention of crafty politicians and mercenary priests—unworthy the attention of lofty minds; that virtue and vice are mere arbitrary distinctions, raised and preserved from selfish motives, tolerated by popular ignorance, and to be abolished by philosophy; that we are wholly irresponsible for our actions—whether good or evil—except, forsooth, to ourselves, or to each other; that there is nothing beyond the present transitory life, to beget a hope or a fear; and, that death is an eternal sleep, the wreck of our entire being; complete annihilation!

3. These direful sentiments have, at no time, indeed, obtained currency in the world; nor have they been thought worthy of acceptance, but by a very insignificant proportion—a mere fraction—of the human family. In ages gone by, they were confined to a few speculative philosophers,—men of genius, but eccentric; scholars, but vain; acute, but supercilious—who, affecting independence of mind, discarded, at once, as useless lumber, all ancient and popular religious creeds, to be themselves of no creed; who, pretending to be the only lights of the world, undertook, as it is well expressed, “to

baffle the Deity into nothing ; unteach the world religion ; raze out impressions renewed and transmitted through so many ages, and persuade the race of men to descend a peg lower, and believe they ought to live, and shall die, like the perishing beast ;"<sup>1</sup>—who, in short, with the name of philosophers, taught the most consummate folly ; and, pretending to set their disciples right on difficult points of religion, seduced them into fatal errors, and extinguished, for ever, the last waning sparks of piety in their bosoms.

4. To the ancient Greek philosophers are, probably, to be ascribed, the first systematic attempts to explain the phenomena of the universe, irrespective of an Omnipotent Intelligence. They taught a kind of theological philosophy ; but many of them were atheistically inclined. Their numerous schools were so many nurseries of scepticism ; and the founders and principals of these schools—the oracles of their respective sects—were a kind of Titans, who, having made war upon the fabulous gods of the nations, and dealt out destruction to them, sought to subject to a speculative annihilation, the Creator and Upholder of the world. In public, indeed, they favoured the popular superstitions ; but, in private, and with their disciples, they laughed at all religion as egregious folly. Their respective theories were so many metaphysical cobwebs, contradictory and childish. Ignorant of inductive logic, they soared into the regions of fancy. To speculate, dispute, quibble, rather than to discover truth, was too much their object. They suggested difficulties, without obviating them ; proposed problems, but furnished no solution ; amused, but failed to convey solid instruction. Their writings are, for the most part, destitute of interest, with here and there, indeed, a just sentiment, or a felicitous expression, like a few flowers scattered over a wide and sterile waste, or

<sup>1</sup> Howe's Living Temple.

a few precious grains buried amidst heaps of rubbish. It is difficult to find out, what many of them really believed or meant. As, however, the poets—the first Greek writers,—had peopled the world with divinities; these “wise men” sought to rid it of every object entitled to religious veneration. Their atheism was ingeniously masked; and the common people,—whom they despised, but never instructed,—could not raise the vizard, and detect the deception; but the *initiated* possessed the secret,—they were not ignorant of the fraud. With the names of these pretended masters of science is connected, on the page of ancient history, a virtual denial, at least, of the *ὁ Θεός*—the God of the universe. The learned reader does not need a statement, in detail, of their conflicting and childish fancies; and the unlearned would receive no edification from it.<sup>1</sup>

5. These primitive atheists have had disciples in most ages, who, to borrow an idea from Cicero, watered their orchards from their master's clouds. From Greece, the atheism of the schools crossed the Hadriatic, passed into Italy, and obtained favor in the palaces of the Cæsars and the mansions of the patricians. There can be no doubt, that many of the leading men in the Roman commonwealth, were infected with this dreadful pestilence of the mind. This would be likely to result from the frequent intercourse between the two countries; from the high estimation in which every thing Grecian was held at Rome; and from the custom which obtained amongst the principal Roman families, of sending their sons to finish their education in some Greek school.<sup>2</sup>

6. For a thousand years, embracing what are usually called the middle ages, there was, throughout the world, an almost intellectual night—a comparative stagnation

<sup>1</sup> An ample account of these men and their opinions will be found in Bayle's General Dictionary—in Dr. Cadworth's Intellectual System of the Universe—in Enfield's History of Philosophy, *cum multis aliis*.

<sup>2</sup> Lucretius and Horace, for example, were both sent to Athens, to finish their education, and both became atheists. The former persevered



of thought—a collapse of the mental faculties—a state of slumber, general and profound. There might be, here and there, a judicial astrologer, who pretended to unfold the Book of Fate; or an alchemist, whose occult operations promised a speedy discovery of the philosopher's stone; or a chronicler, who recounted, in verses without rhyme or reason, the legendary miracles of some reputed saint, or the exploits of some amorous and devoted knight: but little inquiry was made into abstruse and difficult subjects; science—whether physical or metaphysical, mathematical or theological—was cultivated only in pretence; and a taste for literature hardly existed. Books were few; there were no private libraries:—printing was unknown; and transcription was laborious, tedious, and costly. Paper had not been manufactured; and parchment and papyrus were scarce and expensive. Persons capable of reading were rarely found; and, even the ministers of religion were, to a great extent, grossly illiterate. The works of the ancient Greek and Latin authors were preserved, by being collected into monasteries: they were hardly known *by name* beyond the walls of these edifices; and even within them, probably, were little read and less understood. Few persons were disposed, or indeed able, to speculate: the mental efforts of the entire period were, with rare exceptions, few and feeble; and the knowledge possessed, must have been exceedingly limited and superficial, not the result of much thinking or research. We may infer, therefore, that avowal of religious disbelief was far, very far, from the fashion of those times. The people who regarded every thing in religion with a

in his errors, and employed his genius to immortalize them: the latter abandoned *his*, and has left on record, in lyric poems of extraordinary beauty, his testimony to their consummate folly:—

*Pareus deorum cultor et infrequens,*

*Insaniens dum sapientem*

*Consultus erro, nunc retrorsum*

*Vela dare, atque iterare cursus.*

*Cecor relictos,*

*B. I. Ode 34.*

superstitious veneration ; who looked for the direct interference of an invisible power, to terminate all their judicial disputes ; and, who yielded themselves, obsequiously, to the guidance of those whom they viewed as the ministers of that power, were not likely to be chargeable with atheism. They would as soon have thought of denying, or doubting, their own existence, as of calling in question the existence of God.<sup>1</sup>

7. After the revival of science and literature in Europe, sceptics sprang up to a fearful extent, both in this country and on the continent, who, to be free-thinkers in religion and morals, adopted and recommended a latitudinarianism repugnant alike to right feeling and sound philosophy ; a freedom built upon the rejection of all restraint,—of all that can really dignify and endear human nature ; an universal irreligion. We here contemplate one of those counter excesses, to which the mind of man is frequently liable ; like the pendulum of a clock, which flies from side to side of the case in which it moves. From a blameable mental quiescence, they became inconveniently restless ; from a stupid credulity and tame submission, which effectually restrained them from discussing the correctness of any opinion, or the wisdom of any ceremony, they passed to a criminal incredulity and confidence ; and, from being, in a certain sense, too religious, to be radically impious. The writings of the ancient atheists were brought out from their dusty recesses ; their contents were perused with avidity ; and all their obsolete objections against God, Providence, and a future life, were urged with singular ingenuity. To ignorant and unwary minds, these objections may seem to possess some validity ; but to others, they are without point or force.

<sup>1</sup> For a farther account of the matters incidentally touched upon in the above paragraph, we beg to refer the reader to Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* ; to Mosheim's *Ecclesiastical History* ; but especially to Hallam's *History of the Middle Ages*, a work of great research and learning.

8. Some sceptics, of the last century, carefully preserved method in their madness; and, with desperate notions about religion, retained much modesty of feeling; studying to conceal, rather than to disclose, their real sentiments; insinuating, rather than avowing, their opinions; and confining their reveries to their own families and a few select friends. And even others, who openly avowed their horrid conjectures—for beyond conjecture no sceptic can proceed—nibbled at some property of the Divine Nature, at some feature of his moral character, at his providential and moral administration, or at some part of it: but in their career of error, they hesitated to take the ultimate step—to perform the last insane act, and declare themselves confirmed atheists.

9. There are persons in the present day—acute, learned, entitled to consideration—who are atheists, or whose religious belief is, at least, doubtful. They do not declaim against an intelligent almighty Creator; but they profess to account for every thing by natural causes: nor scoff at religious belief, for they think it a harmless delusion, or a useful expedient; nor decry pious observances, but they deem them needless. Whatever province of the works of the Creator they traverse, in prosecuting their inquiries, they are not led ‘through nature, up to nature’s God.’ And here is the wonder! Others, far more gifted and famed than themselves, see God in every thing, while they see him in nothing. The original discoverers of the great laws of the creation did not stop short of God, in their views and explanations of the universe: they felt, that there is a cause beyond all, hitherto, discovered causes; a law, superior to all mechanical laws; an ultimate principle of life and motion, which operates universally, unseen and unspent; an intelligent Power, that first produced, and still sustains, the entire system of nature. But these minor philosophers, who avail themselves of the results



of the stupendous labors of others, and adopt their discoveries as the basis of their own reasoning, or as the data of their own calculations, do not, however, sympathize with their religious views and feelings.

10. Atheistical opinions are, indeed, no longer confined to a select few:—they are spreading amongst the multitude: they are changing sides, and, by a transition not unaccountable, are passing from philosophers to the rabble, and from palaces and mansions, to workshops and taprooms: they are not now associated with modesty and diffidence—with the feelings which would suggest, ‘We may be wrong, and, therefore, it behoves us to pause;’ for atheists have grown impudent, glory in their shame, boast of their singularity, exult in the visionary hope of a speedy universality for their sentiments; and have openly commenced a crusade against all religion, an enterprise to undeify the Deity, and banish his worship and his name from the world. They are no longer shy of a candid declaration of their sentiments; they do not now throw out mysterious hints, or propose religious enigmas, to an intimate acquaintance, or to a coterie of attached and confidential friends; but proclaim, aloud and explicitly, their confirmed disbelief of all and every thing which other persons believe, as to religious matters. They do not, as formerly, seek to recommend their poisonous notions, by means of a sprinkling of philosophy, or the attractions of eloquence; for, we have now barefaced atheism exhibited, in association with the lowest vulgarity and illiteracy; and, persons can spout blasphemy, who can hardly subscribe their names, or repeat the letters of the alphabet.

11. A great moral strife has undoubtedly commenced: and in this strife, the points at issue between the antagonists are not, which is the safest path to immortality; but, whether an immortal life be an ingenious fiction or a grand reality: not, what modification of re-

ligion is to be preferred; but, whether there shall be religion at all: not, what worship of the Deity is most expedient or becoming; but, whether there be a God to be worshipped. Atheists have arrived, at length, to the very acme of impious and insolent daring; to such a degree of assurance and recklessness, that, even in ordinary conversation, they affirm oracularly, that the Deity is an imaginary being—a contradiction—an impossibility; that fools, old women, and children only believe that there is a God, as silly people, in days gone by, yielded a ready credence to the tales of centaurs and fairies; and, that future generations, renovated by the discoveries of philosophy, will treat the present notions of a Divinity, as we regard the mythology of pagan antiquity!

12. It is impossible—and the attempt would be preposterous—to shut our eyes to the character of the times on which we have fallen; times, portentous of mighty events—events, which threaten to convulse and revolutionize the world—the world, especially, of mind and morals. Much good, no doubt, is working; but much evil is working too. The powers of darkness will, by and by, have no new and untried expedient, to demoralize and destroy us. For many ages, they employed false religions, to accomplish their malevolent designs; subsequently, they leagued with suitable instruments, to corrupt the true religion; and now, they have formed a confederacy, with kindred agents, to try a no-religion scheme. Clubs are industriously got up, to concoct plans and procure pecuniary means; publications, to a great numerical amount, are continually sent forth from the press; stated lectures are delivered,—and all for this *wise, virtuous, and benevolent* end—to eradicate from the public mind what are called silly and pernicious notions of a Deity—and to implant, in their place, more philosophical and useful sentiments! The real aim of all these agencies is not what is pretended;



but to destroy our institutions; to annihilate, at once, our hearths and altars; to dry up the very springs of morality and religion; to make us helpless orphans in an orphan world; to send us to burrow in the earth for our highest joys and hopes; and, in short, to commingle, in one general chaos, all the existing elements of society.

13. It is the opinion of an author whose writings are deservedly popular, that atheism is hastening to occupy the ground, which superstition long ago vacated. The correctness of this opinion is, however, doubted; and, by a strange delusion, some well-meaning persons pertinaciously maintain, that a genuine case of atheism does not exist,—that no man really disbelieves that there is a God. A few persons, it is said, in ancient times, were called atheists, because they contemned and ridiculed the popular superstitions: but, they were not, in fact, atheists; they did not repudiate the idea of a God. The objection may be correct enough, in relation to some of them; but it cannot be applied to all, without the rejection of evidence which ought to produce conviction in every honest and candid mind. When persons—whether in Greece, or in Britain, thousands of years ago, or yesterday, avow certain opinions, as their own, defend them against all opposition, and suffer much and long, rather than renounce them, they are entitled to credit for sincerity,—they really believe the opinions which they profess, however false and injurious. By what means these opinions are attained, and with what tempers they are held, are totally distinct:—What we wish to impress is simply the fact, that there may be genuine cases of atheistical opinion. To deny this fact, argues great ignorance of ancient and modern history; nor less of the present state of society, both amongst ourselves and in other countries.

14. The ranks of atheists, it is boasted, have of late received considerable accessions; and from this, it is

triumphantly inferred, that atheistic sentiments will speedily supplant all others, and rid the world of the last relics of ages of ignorant credulity and superstitious observance. The march of intellect, it is said, will soon make all men philosophers; and all philosophers will be atheists! Glorious consummation, truly! if we are to believe, that atheism is the very best expedient for bringing on the golden age of the world; and, that atheists are, therefore, the best benefactors of their species. But, reader! when you can believe, that a foul and fatal epidemic would be greatly for the health and longevity of a people; or that an everlasting night would prove a distinguished advantage to the animal and the vegetable kingdoms; or, that a set of notions which, as they obtained, would brutalize all classes of society; open the flood-gates of impiety and misery of every kind and degree; and let in upon us a more fatal deluge than that from which poor Deucalion and his wife Pyrrha escaped, would be highly promotive of the purity and felicity of the world:—We repeat, when you can give credence to all these incredible paradoxes; and receive, as matters of fact, indisputable verities—these contradictory positions—these utter impossibilities—then may you believe also, that atheism would prove a benefit to the human race!

Deluded and miserable mortals! what advantage do atheists propose to bestow upon us? Where shall we find a catalogue of their past benefactions? To what page of general or particular history can they point us, which records the blessings that they have already vouchsafed, to enable us to infer the kind yet in reserve? Whatever they may promise, and however fair their speech, their gifts would prove, to all who accepted them, like the deceitful and fatal box which Pandora received from Jupiter. It is matter of cordial congratulation, that the world has had but little experience of atheists; but we are not ignorant of their devices.

20 CATHOLICAL TENDENCY OF THE PRESENT TIMES.

For instance, was there not much concerning the wily  
*Scotsman*—“*The powers were wroth with Duncan?*”  
“*There was some grudge of the Scotsman can be free from  
dread?*” The same question may be proposed, with equal  
emphasis, in reference to our nobles. Whatever  
improving pretensions they may set up, or false titles  
assume to themselves, they merit no other or milder  
appellation, than that of tyrants. We are able honestly  
to expose the secrets of their business. It would be thus:—

It is might that never will be our task,  
But ever to do ill our main design,  
To bring the contrary to the right will  
Which we mean.

*Macb.*, 3. 1. v. 61.

: *Paradise Lost*, 3. 1.

## CHAPTER II.

SOME OF THE CAUSES OF THE INCREASE OF ATHEISTICAL  
SENTIMENTS.

1. CERTAIN seasons are eminently favourable to the production and propagation of fatal diseases ; and some states of society engender and foster mental delusion to a fearful extent. The state of society in this country—and, indeed, throughout Europe—for some years, has just been fitted to produce scepticism of every kind and degree ; nor would it be difficult to prove, that many of the causes which produced the atheism of a neighbouring nation, towards the close of the last century, have been in full operation amongst ourselves. Wicked men, who would have no God but themselves, no laws but their passions, no ends but their selfish interests, have perceived and improved their advantage. We have had political agitators to produce anarchy ; and religious agitators to produce impiety. These infatuated persons predict, with a kind of satanic exultation, the success of their diabolical efforts. They would gladly fulfil their own predictions : but, they are not prophets, except false ones ; and it is a mercy to their species, that they are as impotent as they are short-sighted.

2. It has been thought by some, that the more general education of the people and the advancement of knowledge, have contributed to the spread of atheistical sentiments. We must confess our inability to trace the connection of cause and effect between these. In what

way strengthening the powers of the human mind and enlarging its capacity can contribute to delude it, we have yet to learn. An ignorant man is more likely to be the dupe of imposture, than a man of information,—is more tenacious of his prejudices, and is less assailable by argument. Knowledge is to the mind, what light is to the eye, the medium through which it descries objects, and distinguishes reality from pretension, and truth from error: and, to retain people in ignorance, lest they should make a bad use of knowledge, is precisely as if they should be immured in a dungeon—in absolute darkness—lest they should abuse the light of heaven. If persons, who have been taught to think, and whose education enables them to take a wider range for their thoughts, are tempted, by the superior facilities which they possess, to indulge in speculation on subjects beyond their reach; the farther they proceed, the greater will be the accumulation of their difficulties, until, at length, perplexed and confounded, they will have learned a salutary lesson of human inability, and desist from the unavailing research, with, “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.” Men of reflection and information are less likely to be ensnared by error; or, if ensnared, are more easily extricated:—they perceive the hindrances which beset every inquiry, beyond a certain point; and would be the last persons to make their own opinions the criterion of all truth. In opposition to this view, indeed, is the well-known adage, that ‘a little knowledge is dangerous:’ but so, also, is a little of many other things, which are, nevertheless, both desirable and important. We are not, however, discussing the question of popular education; but, refuting the hypothesis, that an increase of it in the country, is the necessary cause of a growing scepticism on religion.

3. The disputes which have disturbed and divided the world, on the subjects of theological controversy, have

been supposed to produce, in some persons, doubt and disbelief of all religion. To a man unacquainted with human nature and the ways of the world, these might prove a stumbling-block in his inquiries after truth; but, what subjects of public interest have not divided the opinions, and brought into collision the passions of men? Entire uniformity of sentiment never yet existed, for any length of time, between a large number of persons, on matters which admitted of diversity. Sooner may all the clocks in the world continue to indicate the hour with undeviating exactness, than that the inhabitants of the world should all see eye to eye.

But, to what of religion do men's disputes generally relate? Not, certainly, to its first and fundamental truth. On this point, all the religious sections of the world are perfectly agreed. The Jew, the Christian, the Mahometan, the pagan, all believe that there is a God:—and, as an able writer observes, 'he needs to have a very strong and very clear reason to shew, who dares to withstand the common suffrage of mankind, and to challenge all the world of mistake.' To deny that there is a God, because all men do not agree to worship him under the same name, or in the same manner, is just as irrational as to deny, that there is any great law of nature, because philosophers differ, in opinion, as to its precise nature, or the mode of its operation; or, to deny, that civil government is a blessing, because citizens entertain opposite views, as to what form of government is preferable. The fact of the Divine existence is perfectly distinct from all differences about religion itself, strictly so called; and, can no more be affected by them, than any one of the grand facts of the creation can be disproved, by a diversity of opinion in relation to some of its circumstances.

4. The primary and principal cause of all atheistical notions, is the depravity of the human heart. It is the passions of men, not their reason, which originate dis-

belief of a Deity. "The fool says in his *heart*, There is no God ;"—that is, he *desires* there were none. It is not for the advantage of wicked men, as one observes, that there should be a God. And as it is usual with people to desire that which is supposed for their advantage ; so, the irreligious of mankind fondly cherish the wish, that the creator of the world were as unreal a being, as the Jupiter or the Pan of the ancient heathen. And, what they ardently wish to be true, they endeavor to believe so ;—and, after a lengthened series of efforts to coerce their minds, their endeavors succeed, and they can flatter themselves on the attainment which they have made. It is false and foolish to pretend, that persons of certain principles and practices can like to retain God in their minds, or in their creeds. We can easily conceive such persons, in moments of reflection, pursuing, almost insensibly, a train of thought, like the following :—' If there be a creator and upholder of the universe, it is probable that he is also its governor ; and should his administration extend to this world, it is probable, that my actions are displeasing to him ; and should there be a future life and a retributive judgment, I am likely to suffer the penalties of my offences ;—I hope, therefore, that all notions of a Deity are unfounded ; and, that the pretended Deity himself is, altogether, a creation of some age of superstitious delusion.'

5. The superior zeal of atheists, in disseminating their pestilential opinions, has contributed greatly to their increase. The friends of religion cannot be charged with apathetic indifference towards its interests. The multitude of well-organized societies, throughout the world, which co-operate with harmony and efficiency, in promoting the cause of truth and righteousness, is a palpable and permanent proof of the existence of much hallowed zeal in the church,—zeal kindled by the best motives, and directed to the attainment of the



noblest ends. But it has occurred to us as a singular fact, that the attention of religious people has been so little awake to the wide spreading scepticism of the present day; and, that their zealous efforts have not been more specially directed to extinguish or counteract it. Lectures are delivered to propagate atheism; but, who has heard of lectures to refute it? Thousands of horrible publications are distributed amongst the populace, to proselyte them to the notions of our modern free-thinkers: but, amidst the innumerable religious books, of all sorts and sizes, which are incessantly issuing from the press, comparatively few make a direct attack upon these works of the devil. They assume—mistakenly, as we think—a universality of belief in the Divine existence; and thus give the world credit for a greater sum of truth and virtue, than, on minute inspection, it is found to contain. Confederacies are formed, to secure for sceptical sentiments publicity and prevalency;—why should there not be a cordial and compact alliance of holy men, of all religious parties, to maintain the outraged honors of the Deity, and to defeat, by every legitimate means, the infernal designs, which are now in operation upon a great portion of the ignorant and unthinking part of the community? If atheists set up their temples of reason, to teach all ranks of persons that religion is a senseless and pernicious device, we cannot comprehend why believers should not erect temples of theology, to explain the evidences, principles, and claims of religion; to expose the arrogant pretensions of the human mind, when it would travel beyond its province; and to prove to all persons, who need the proof, that they act most like reasonable beings, when they weigh facts, admit probabilities,—where demonstration cannot be obtained—and yield to the force of evidence which ought to produce conviction.

6. An insufficiency of elementary instruction, on the



of the stupendous labors of others, and adopt their discoveries as the basis of their own reasoning, or as the data of their own calculations, do not, however, sympathize with their religious views and feelings.

10. Atheistical opinions are, indeed, no longer confined to a select few:—they are spreading amongst the multitude: they are changing sides, and, by a transition not unaccountable, are passing from philosophers to the rabble, and from palaces and mansions, to workshops and taprooms: they are not now associated with modesty and diffidence—with the feelings which would suggest, ‘We may be wrong, and, therefore, it behoves us to pause;’ for atheists have grown impudent; glory in their shame, boast of their singularity, exult in the visionary hope of a speedy universality for their sentiments; and have openly commenced a crusade against all religion, an enterprise to undeify the Deity, and banish his worship and his name from the world. They are no longer shy of a candid declaration of their sentiments; they do not now throw out mysterious hints, or propose religious enigmas, to an intimate acquaintance, or to a coterie of attached and confidential friends; but proclaim, aloud and explicitly, their confirmed disbelief of all and every thing which other persons believe, as to religious matters. They do not, as formerly, seek to recommend their poisonous notions, by means of a sprinkling of philosophy, or the attractions of eloquence; for, we have now barefaced atheism exhibited, in association with the lowest vulgarity and illiteracy; and, persons can spout blasphemy, who can hardly subscribe their names, or repeat the letters of the alphabet.

11. A great moral strife has undoubtedly commenced: and in this strife, the points at issue between the antagonists are not, which is the safest path to immortality; but, whether an immortal life be an ingenious *fiction* or a *grand reality*: not, what modification of re-

ligion is to be preferred; but, whether there shall be religion at all: not, what worship of the Deity is most expedient or becoming; but, whether there be a God to be worshipped. Atheists have arrived, at length, to the very acme of impious and insolent daring; to such a degree of assurance and recklessness, that, even in ordinary conversation, they affirm oracularly, that the Deity is an imaginary being—a contradiction—an impossibility; that fools, old women, and children only believe that there is a God, as silly people, in days gone by, yielded a ready credence to the tales of centaurs and fairies; and, that future generations, renovated by the discoveries of philosophy, will treat the present notions of a Divinity, as we regard the mythology of pagan antiquity!

12. It is impossible—and the attempt would be preposterous—to shut our eyes to the character of the times on which we have fallen; times, portentous of mighty events—events, which threaten to convulse and revolutionize the world—the world, especially, of mind and morals. Much good, no doubt, is working; but much evil is working too. The powers of darkness will, by and by, have no new and untried expedient, to demoralize and destroy us. For many ages, they employed false religions, to accomplish their malevolent designs; subsequently, they leagued with suitable instruments, to corrupt the true religion; and now, they have formed a confederacy, with kindred agents, to try a no-religion scheme. Clubs are industriously got up, to concoct plans and procure pecuniary means; publications, to a great numerical amount, are continually sent forth from the press; stated lectures are delivered,—and all for this *wise, virtuous, and benevolent* end—to eradicate from the public mind what are called silly and pernicious notions of a Deity—and to implant, in their place, more philosophical and useful sentiments! The *real aim of all these agencies* is not what is pretended;

but to destroy our institutions; to annihilate, at once, our hearths and altars; to dry up the very springs of morality and religion; to make us helpless orphans in an orphan world; to send us to burrow in the earth for our highest joys and hopes; and, in short, to commingle, in one general chaos, all the existing elements of society.

13. It is the opinion of an author whose writings are deservedly popular, that atheism is hastening to occupy the ground, which superstition long ago vacated. The correctness of this opinion is, however, doubted; and, by a strange delusion, some well-meaning persons pertinaciously maintain, that a genuine case of atheism does not exist,—that no man really disbelieves that there is a God. A few persons, it is said, in ancient times, were called atheists, because they contemned and ridiculed the popular superstitions: but, they were not, in fact, atheists; they did not repudiate the idea of a God. The objection may be correct enough, in relation to some of them; but it cannot be applied to all, without the rejection of evidence which ought to produce conviction in every honest and candid mind. When persons—whether in Greece, or in Britain, thousands of years ago, or yesterday, avow certain opinions, as their own, defend them against all opposition, and suffer much and long, rather than renounce them, they are entitled to credit for sincerity,—they really believe the opinions which they profess, however false and injurious. By what means these opinions are attained, and with what tempers they are held, are totally distinct:—What we wish to impress is simply the fact, that there may be genuine cases of atheistical opinion. To deny this fact, argues great ignorance of ancient and modern history; nor less of the present state of society, both amongst ourselves and in other countries.

14. *The ranks of atheists, it is boasted, have of late received considerable accessions; and from this, it is*



triumphantly inferred, that atheistic sentiments will speedily supplant all others, and rid the world of the last relics of ages of ignorant credulity and superstitious observance. The march of intellect, it is said, will soon make all men philosophers; and all philosophers will be atheists! Glorious consummation, truly! if we are to believe, that atheism is the very best expedient for bringing on the golden age of the world; and, that atheists are, therefore, the best benefactors of their species. But, reader! when you can believe, that a foul and fatal epidemic would be greatly for the health and longevity of a people; or that an everlasting night would prove a distinguished advantage to the animal and the vegetable kingdoms; or, that a set of notions which, as they obtained, would brutalize all classes of society; open the flood-gates of impiety and misery of every kind and degree; and let in upon us a more fatal deluge than that from which poor Deucalion and his wife Pyrrha escaped, would be highly promotive of the purity and felicity of the world:—We repeat, when you can give credence to all these incredible paradoxes; and receive, as matters of fact, indisputable verities—these contradictory positions—these utter impossibilities—then may you believe also, that atheism would prove a benefit to the human race!

Deluded and miserable mortals! what advantage do atheists propose to bestow upon us? Where shall we find a catalogue of their past benefactions? To what page of general or particular history can they point us, which records the blessings that they have already vouchsafed, to enable us to infer the kind yet in reserve? Whatever they may promise, and however fair their speech, their gifts would prove, to all who accepted them, like the deceitful and fatal box which Pandora received from Jupiter. It is matter of cordial congratulation, that the world has had but little experience of atheists; but we are not ignorant of their devices.

## 12 ATHEISTICAL TENDENCY OF THE PRESENT TIMES.

The question was once asked concerning the wily Greeks,—‘*Ulla putates dona carere dolis Danaûm?*’<sup>1</sup> “Think you any gifts of the Greeks can be free from deceit?” The same question may be pressed, with equal emphasis, in reference to our atheists. Whatever imposing pretensions they may set up, or false titles assume to themselves, they merit no other or milder appellative, than that of destroyers. Were they honestly to express the secrets of their bosoms, it would be thus:—

To do aught good never will be our task,  
But ever to do ill our sole delight,  
As being the contrary to his high will  
Whom we resist.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Æneid*, b. ii. v. 43.

<sup>2</sup> *Paradise Lost*, b. i.

## CHAPTER II.

## SOME OF THE CAUSES OF THE INCREASE OF ATHEISTICAL SENTIMENTS.

1. CERTAIN seasons are eminently favourable to the production and propagation of fatal diseases ; and some states of society engender and foster mental delusion to a fearful extent. The state of society in this country—and, indeed, throughout Europe—for some years, has just been fitted to produce scepticism of every kind and degree ; nor would it be difficult to prove, that many of the causes which produced the atheism of a neighbouring nation, towards the close of the last century, have been in full operation amongst ourselves. Wicked men, who would have no God but themselves, no laws but their passions, no ends but their selfish interests, have perceived and improved their advantage. We have had political agitators to produce anarchy ; and religious agitators to produce impiety. These infatuated persons predict, with a kind of satanic exultation, the success of their diabolical efforts. They would gladly fulfil their own predictions : but, they are not prophets, except false ones ; and it is a mercy to their species, that they are as impotent as they are short-sighted.

2. It has been thought by some, that the more general education of the people and the advancement of knowledge, have contributed to the spread of atheistical sentiments. We must confess our inability to trace the *connection of cause and effect* between these. In what

way strengthening the powers of the human mind and enlarging its capacity can contribute to delude it, we have yet to learn. An ignorant man is more likely to be the dupe of imposture, than a man of information,—is more tenacious of his prejudices, and is less assailable by argument. Knowledge is to the mind, what light is to the eye, the medium through which it describes objects, and distinguishes reality from pretension, and truth from error: and, to retain people in ignorance, lest they should make a bad use of knowledge, is precisely as if they should be immured in a dungeon—in absolute darkness—lest they should abuse the light of heaven. If persons, who have been taught to think, and whose education enables them to take a wider range for their thoughts, are tempted, by the superior facilities which they possess, to indulge in speculation on subjects beyond their reach; the farther they proceed, the greater will be the accumulation of their difficulties, until, at length, perplexed and confounded, they will have learned a salutary lesson of human inability, and desist from the unavailing research, with, “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.” Men of reflection and information are less likely to be ensnared by error; or, if ensnared, are more easily extricated:—they perceive the hindrances which beset every inquiry, beyond a certain point; and would be the last persons to make their own opinions the criterion of all truth. In opposition to this view, indeed, is the well-known adage, that ‘a little knowledge is dangerous:’ but so, also, is a little of many other things, which are, nevertheless, both desirable and important. We are not, however, discussing the question of popular education; but, refuting the hypothesis, that an increase of it in the country, is the necessary cause of a growing scepticism on religion.

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5. The superior zeal of atheists, in disseminating their pestilential opinions, has contributed greatly to their increase. The friends of religion cannot be charged with apathetic indifference towards its interests. The multitude of well-organized societies, throughout the world, which co-operate with harmony and efficiency, in promoting the cause of truth and righteousness, is a palpable and permanent proof of the existence of *much* hallowed zeal in the church,—zeal kindled by *the best* motives, and directed to the attainment of the



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subjects of natural religion, may be counted amongst the causes of growing scepticism. Never was there an age more amply provided with the means of religious knowledge; and, never was religious knowledge—amongst persons making pretensions to it—more general and superficial. Deep research and profound thought are, with many, hardly deemed necessary, in the present day. Religious reflection has too much given way to religious bustle. Our forefathers, it is said, investigated and reflected; and, it belongs to us to adopt and act out their views. The influence of this false maxim is injurious in a high degree, both to religious teachers, and to them who are taught. Amongst the evils which result from it, are the following:—comparatively few persons think for themselves in religious matters—every thing is taken for granted—the reason of things is not understood—and the things themselves are neither clearly apprehended, nor tenaciously grasped by the mind. The mind, in such a case, is like a citadel without defence, exposed to every assault, and ready to capitulate to the feeblest enemy.

All classes of religionists have, too much lost sight of elementary truths, and the grounds on which they rest. In many of our seminaries, religion is well nigh excluded; and, in others, where some attention is given to it, it forms no part of the course of education. In our numerous Sabbath-schools, the catechisms which are taught, do not sufficiently embrace and illustrate first principles, nor defend, as they ought, the principles which they do comprehend and explain: the education is rather mechanical, than intellectual; the children are taught to exercise their memories, rather than their understandings. And, if we pass from the school-room to our places of worship, we discover the same deficiency of elementary instruction.

The teacher of philosophy often recurs to first principles, to procure respect and confidence for his theory;

and to impart force and effect to his reasonings. They are not of less importance in religion, than in philosophy ; but they are more frequently assumed in the one, than in the other. They certainly have not that place and prominence in religious discourses to which they are entitled. It may, indeed, be doubted, if the general sentiment favors a frequent discussion of them. The teacher of religion, who should deliver an entire discourse, in the ordinary exercise of his office, on the proofs that there is a God, would expose himself to the charge of trifling, although, perhaps, not one out of every ten persons composing his auditory, could give a rational account of his belief in this great truth.

A lecturer on chymistry, for example, would hardly be thought to waste the time of his pupils, if he, occasionally, reminded them of the simple elementary substances which compose all natural bodies ; and to which successful analysis will reduce them. Now, what these simple elementary substances are to natural bodies, the doctrines of God's being, attributes, providential and moral government, are, for the most part, to religious truth,—they go to make it up :—and, all practical religion must be traced to an intelligent and a cordial belief of them. From these observations it will appear, what facilities are afforded to atheists, by the unwary friends of religion, to insinuate their notions, and to win proselytes to their party.

7. The pride and presumption of reason may occasionally beguile persons into atheism. We feel, in listening to the intellectual pretensions of some men, what we have ever felt, when beholding representations of the fabled Atlas bearing, between his shoulders, the visible heavens ; namely, their prodigious absurdity. These persons assume a competency to grapple with things invisible, as well as visible ; with objects remote, as well as contiguous ; with infinite, as well as finite. They make their own understandings the measure of



all existence, their own judgments the criterion of all truth ;—forgetting, how contracted is the most capacious understanding ; and, how liable to err, the soundest judgment. We are, comparatively, but little creatures, —not bearing the proportion to the visible creation, of an atom to our globe : our senses are few and our powers feeble ; our duration is but a moment, and our space a point ; and, humility and modesty eminently befit us, and are both wise and safe. When we are tempted to think more highly of ourselves than becomes us ; to form an enormous estimate of our own powers ; to apply our minds, with a determined and obstinate perseverance, to subjects beyond, infinitely beyond, the utmost stretch of human observation and thought, and which can never become matters of scrutiny to us ;—what can be expected, in such cases, but a disastrous issue ? Our minds, exhausted at length, by incessant and un-availing toil—overwhelmed by the vastness, or confounded by the remoteness, of the objects sought to be brought under investigation—seek relief, by any means ; —in theory, when fact is not at hand ; in error, if plausible, and possessing the semblance of truth ; in atheism, rather than not obtain relief at all ; and the relief of atheism is delirium.

Persons who devote themselves to investigate the phenomena of nature, labor, ineffectually, to attain a knowledge of their origin. They can proceed, with certainty and satisfaction, to a certain point : but, beyond that point, all is *terra incognita*,—an undiscovered country. Here, they are completely at a stand. By no effort of skill, or facility of science, can they overstep the boundary line, which separates the known from the unknown ; and, to whatever point they turn, or means employ, they find themselves confined, baffled, defeated. Now the fatal error into which some of them *fall, is this*, they fancy themselves at the very end of all that exists to be known—at the last law of nature

—at the ultimate principle of the creation—at the final cause of all existence. And thus they ‘thrust some mechanic cause’ into the place of the Deity; they rest short of God, to make a god of something else. Had an old Greek sophist been requested to account for the origin of his atoms; or, to explain what he meant by his ‘plastic nature,’ he would have been puzzled to furnish an answer. And were the above persons pressed with all the absurdity and contradiction involved in their hypothesis of a final cause, they would be compelled to admit the existence of a cause, still anterior to the one supposed the first.

8. We are compelled, finally, to place amongst the causes of an increase of atheistical opinions, in some quarters, the inoperative faith of a great majority of the professed friends of religion. The first article in the respective creeds of all such persons is, in effect,—“I believe in God.” But, what do they believe concerning him?—That he is the governor and judge of the world, as well as its creator and benefactor?—That they are held accountable to him for their behaviour towards each other, no less than towards himself?—And, that they shall be happy, or miserable, in a future state of existence, as they are virtuous or vicious in the present? Is it credible, that persons who riot in all manner of excesses—oppress, rob, hate, murder each other—really believe these truths? How is it possible to reconcile their detestable and villanous conduct with such a belief? Believe in God! Yes, they believe in God, in all these respects, as they believe in the man in the moon; that is, that there may be one; for whom, however, they care not one straw. But, if their opinions have little or no practical control over themselves, their practices exert a fatal influence over others. The sceptical observers of this disruption of faith and practice—some of whom may, indeed, be wavering—are *confirmed in their scepticism, and seize the advantage,*



thus afforded them, to instil into others—who can better understand the truth and importance of religion from palpable facts, than from abstract reasonings ; and, from the lives of their neighbours, than from their opinions—that religion is altogether a useless and false pretension. And, it must be admitted, that they are too often successful practitioners—their poison is imbibed—the contagion spreads—and, by and by, we have a frightful increase of the malady, which changes all who become infected with it, into aliens from their God, from their species, and from themselves.

## CHAPTER III.

ATHEISM UNWORTHY OF CONSIDERATION,—VIEWED AS  
A THEORY.

1. EVERY system of opinions bears some conventional designation, derived, either from its author, or from one of its leading principles. Accordingly, we read of the Platonic philosophy, the Lutheran creed, and so forth. And thus mankind have agreed to call those views of the creation, which exclude the existence and the agency of a Deity, atheism; and, all who entertain them, atheists.<sup>1</sup> There is a peculiar appropriateness in this application of the terms, since they mean, literally understood, without God;—an awful distinction, in what sense soever, or to whomsoever applied! Atheists are usually divided, for the sake of distinction, into two classes—speculative and practical:—speculative atheists hold the opinion that there is no Supreme First Cause of all things; practical atheists live as if there were none. That thousands of the latter class exist, requires, unfortunately for themselves and society, no proof: and that some of the former are to be met with, incredible as it may seem, admits neither of dispute nor doubt. And to what a pitch of attainment have they reached; or rather, into what depths of infatuation have they sunk; to whose eyes nature exhibits no

<sup>1</sup> The term atheism, or atheist, is derived, (as every school-boy who studies Greek knows,) from the Greek *a* privative,—that is, implying the absence of something, and *theos*, God: so that the etymological, the original and genuine meaning of the term is—no God.

tokens of a Divinity ; to whose ears no voices issuing from her profound recesses, proclaim a Creator ; and in whose bosom there is no stirring sense —no conscious apprehension of an Invisible Power !

2. The rejection, however, of an intelligent Creator, is not the only horrible peculiarity of an atheistical creed. As, in a system of planets, should the primary planet be destroyed, the entire system must go to wreck : so the doctrine of the Divine existence, the grand primary truth in every scheme of religion, being renounced ; religion,—in every sense of the term, is, wholly and for ever, at an end. If there be no God, there can be no religion : whether the word be understood to mean a number of doctrines, amongst which his being and perfections hold a distinguished place ; or, various duties, of which he is the principal object. The doctrine of a creating, upholding, presiding Divinity, imparts to all other religious doctrines, their meaning, importance, and efficacy ; to all religious principles, their being and stability ; to all religious practices their abiding obligations ; and, to all religious hopes and joys their validity and certainty. Let this, therefore, be repudiated, and not a vestige, not a shadow remains of that, which has ever been held, by all ages and nations, as the best directory, distinction, safe-guard, and solace of mankind.

Thus, atheists wage a war of extermination, indiscriminately, against all religion ; they would allow it neither a place nor a name in the world. And they would extinguish it, by extinguishing Him, who is, at once, its author and its end. And if, at any time, they condescend, forsooth, to pronounce his name, it is only to express their unnatural and infernal dislike to him ; to tell him, or rather of him, how thoroughly hateful the idea of a God is to them. There is no antipathy, no natural aversion, so powerful and monstrous, as that moral antipathy, or aversion, which atheists

cherish towards the author and sustainer of their being. The mere sound of his name acts upon them in a way analogous to the sight of water upon persons afflicted with a certain canine disease.

3. Some malignant diseases eventually expend themselves,—the lapse of time destroys, or abates their virus; but atheism, as a moral pestilence, loses nothing from years: it remains essentially unchanged, possesses precisely the same tendency, produces the same results, whether we contemplate its operation and effects in the followers of Epicurus, or in the disciples of David Hume: it injures, as we think, the intellectual powers, corrupts and destroys the moral constitution, and gives an unnatural and emphatic impetus to all the animal passions. O how fallen! how changed! how utterly besotted are they, who can discern no wisdom, where all is contrivance,—nor power, where Omnipotence itself is in exercise; nor goodness, where nature is teeming with satisfactions and delights!

Modern atheism, in short, differs very little from the atheism of the ancients, except that its spirit is more virulent and violent. This may arise from its association with less intellect, less learning, and less refinement of manners now, than formerly; or, from its connection with a deeper and more determined depravity; from a recklessness of appearances and consequences, rarely witnessed in the conduct of sane persons, but peculiarly characteristic of *him*, who is the original and efficient fabricator of all “damnable heresies.”

4. In attempting to illustrate a scheme of atheistical opinions, in order to expose its worthlessness, we have this difficulty to encounter at the commencement, that the opinions of no one atheist can be taken as a sample of the opinions of all. The learned and laborious Dr. Cudworth has shewn, with great ability and patience of research, that amongst the ancient philosophers, there existed several distinct kinds of atheistical opinions,—



their faces did not differ more than their sentiments. And, this is just what might be suspected, independent of the discovery or the announcement of the fact. As well may so many mariners attempt to navigate an unknown, a trackless, boundless ocean, without a chart, compass, or celestial signs, by which to steer their course, with the expectation, that after years of sailing, in various directions, they should meet in precisely the same points of latitude and longitude: as that a number of speculative men, blind, or indifferent, to the only evidence which the Deity has afforded of his existence, and consequently, denying it, should hope to arrive at the same conclusions, concerning the subjects on which their speculations would be likely to turn. We must, therefore, select a few opinions common to all, who have either aspired to the distinction of being accounted atheists, or merited to be placed amongst those disbelievers, whom nearly all the world have united to deem execrable, and view them with other opinions of an opposite character, and entertained by all who believe that there is a Creator and Governor of the world. Thus the schemes of theism and atheism will be better apprehended and estimated, by being shown in brief detail, and exhibited in direct contrast.

5. Theism rests upon indelible instincts, palpable facts, irrefragable arguments, common sense and observation:—upon what basis does atheism rest? What instincts urge a man to renounce the author of his being? What facts can be collected from the appearances of nature, or traced out amongst her depths, to justify a man to his conscience, or to his fellows, in proclaiming, with all the assurance of an actual discovery, that an Intelligent Agent is not the first cause of all existence? What arguments can the most ingenious logicians frame, to carry conviction to the bosom of a Kepler, a Newton, or a Boyle, that the Great Object of his devotion is a phantasm? And how can a sound-

minded deliberative man be induced to believe—contrary to all analogy—that what he beholds in nature, what he is in himself, what he feels within his bosom, goes for nothing towards indicating the fact, or sustaining the inference, of an all-creating governing Intelligence?

Theism assigns an adequate cause for all the numerous forms of existence; makes us subjects of moral government; appoints us a rank in a graduated scale of being, and a part to act on the theatre of life, worthy of ourselves:—atheism teaches, that all existence is equally and wholly causeless; holds us accountable to no divine power; and permits us to claim no superior nature, to aim at no nobler end, and to hope for no higher destiny, than brutes.

Theism is essentially preservative of all that we are accustomed to hold dear; suggests and strengthens our social order; binds us together in an endearing relation, as alike the offspring of one Great Parent; places the whole system of human affairs, and ourselves, in particular, under the ever-watchful supervision and unerring direction of an invisible Being, whose perfections are so many distinct securities of all our interests:—atheism carries absolute destruction into all our highest concerns; substitutes confusion for order; produces a disruption of all the sympathies of our common nature; and, while it encourages the proud and profligate to riot, in all conceivable excesses, under the perverted notion of living while they live, and, with an assurance of absolute impunity, it wrests from the miserable the last solace of affliction.

Theism places before us an original, a perfect pattern of all possible excellence; imposes powerful restraints on vice; suggests urgent motives to virtue; begets mutual confidence, in all transactions between man and man; holds rectitude essential to happiness, and devotion indispensable to rectitude:—atheism, however,



exhibits no such pattern of moral excellence; makes our chief good to consist in the gratification of our animal appetites; destroys all confidence; and proscribes sabbaths, temples, priests, and prayers, as worse than useless.

6. Such, then, are the schemes which religionists and non-religionists respectively maintain; schemes as opposite as the poles, and as irreconcilable as antagonist principles. Between all religious people—however separated by time or space, however dissimilar in language and customs, however different in modes of faith and forms of worship—there are points of agreement, truths concerning which there is no dispute, certain opinions which accredit them as religious, as much as their face and voice identify them with humanity. But the atheist is an alien from all; he has nothing in common with any; he is a dissentient from his fellows; a discordant note amidst the harmonies of the universe; an isolated atom, possessing no sympathy with the great mass of intelligent and moral existence.

7. It may, indeed, induce a sigh, or extort a tear, that there should exist individuals deserving the opprobrious designation of atheists; that rational and moral beings should be so infatuated with pernicious fancies; so perverse in their notions, or wicked in their antipathies; so lost to all reason and religion, as to expunge from their creed, or to obliterate from their hearts, a belief in the existence of the Great Being who formed and sustains them:—that persons should be so far gone from modesty and decency, as to have the effrontery to affirm to their neighbours, or to announce to the ears of the world, their own dereliction of opinions, which tens of thousands of mankind—bright with intelligence and fragrant with excellence—have ever held dearer than life itself. But with what eccentricities, follies, and impieties are not some persons chargeable! Who, that has a moderate acquaintance with mankind, does not

know to what opposite extremes of credulity and disbelief, superstition and scepticism, they run! There is no opinion too much at variance with common sense, too palpably absurd, too frightfully monstrous, to be entertained by the human mind! And, on the other hand, sentiments as evidently true as they are deeply important, are superciliously rejected, without previous examination or subsequent compunction. Some persons believe, without evidence; others disbelieve, against evidence; and not a few adopt whatever opinions lie in their way, regardless of their truth or falsehood; and then lay them aside, or exchange them for others, as circumstances may arise, with little hesitation, and reckless of results.

8. But, finally, the existence or the progress of any mental error, which diminishes the evil, and favours the indulgence of moral error, can surprise no one who understands the inherent predilections of our corrupt hearts: we love darkness, in some respects, rather than light. Atheistic sentiments recommend themselves to every profligate, immoral man. To reduce the Deity to a non-entity, or to circumscribe his perfections, must, above all other things, seem, to such a person, a *desideratum*. And if a considerable portion of every community consists of well-informed, deliberative, morally excellent persons, a vast majority is made up of individuals, ignorant and unthinking; disinclined to attempt, and, consequently, unable to prosecute, consecutive trains of thought; unacquainted alike, with the evidences of natural and revealed religion; the slaves of impetuous passions; glad to cherish a hope of escape, by any means, from the dreaded penalties of years of transgressions; and, therefore, the willing dupes of atheistical fancies, although the bare possibility that such fancies are false, might well appal the stoutest heart.

## CHAPTER IV.

## ATHEISM REPUGNANT TO THE GENERAL BELIEF OF MANKIND, PAST AND PRESENT.

1. OUR views of remote ages are dim, as well as distant; and, therefore, our knowledge of them hardly deserves the name. In attempting to realize them, the mind encounters difficulties similar to those of the eye, when it would survey, from some elevated position, an unknown and distant landscape, through the medium of a faint moonlight, or by the aid of a few astral rays. They are, in short, as completely inaccessible to us, except by means of some traditionary intimation; some ancient coin, or crumbling fragment, some allusive observation, or brief and imperfect chronicle, as ages yet to come. Scanty are the materials, and few are the facts which go to make up, whatever record of remote antiquity has descended to us; and, of course, it is, in many respects, exceedingly defective, uncertain, and unsatisfactory.

Upon all ancient times, indeed, rests a dense mist which we attempt, in vain, to disperse; and we soon enter it, and become involved in distressing confusion and uncertainty, when we would transport ourselves back, and become conversant with the early morning of the world; and with the character, sentiments, customs, and so forth, of the men who then lived and flourished. We ask now, to little purpose, what was the appearance of the earth, thousands of years ago? What were the boundaries of such a kingdom? Where was the site of such



a city? To what degree of civilization did such people attain? How and with whom originated letters? Who first cultivated the arts? Who were the first students of philosophy? But, whatever degree of obscurity and uncertainty attaches to distant æras of the world, and to the circumstances of persons and things, then existing, there is one grand fact which stands out on every page of ancient history, and which, although the mere natural philosopher or antiquary may disregard it, will not fail to arrest and fix the attention of the religious inquirer; namely, the universality of a religious belief, coeval and commensurate with the human family.

2. The time was, probably, when political divisions of the earth did not exist; when kingdoms were not founded, nor cities built; when civilization had not imparted her refinements to the human species; when literature, the arts, the sciences, were little known: but, in what age was man without God? when were all mankind atheists? We can, however, get at the origin of many things; we can trace the commencement of some sections of the human race; we can tell who built certain cities, and founded the kingdoms, of which they became the capitals; we can assign authors to particular codes of laws and systems of philosophical opinions: but, who were the first believers in a Deity? Who first expressed religious sentiments? Who first built altars and offered sacrifices? The history of every people begins with an account of their religion, and would be incomplete without. The inference, we willingly leave to the consideration and disposal of the advocates of Atheism.

3. Some distant nations are as little known to us, as remote ages. Inquisitive and enterprising as we are, many things have tended to isolate mankind, and to retain the different sections of the human family, descended from the same stock and made of one blood, in inconvenient ignorance of each other. A love of

country, the labor and expence of travelling, the diversity of languages, the difference of climates, the tie of connection, and other causes, combine to withhold us from emigrating, and to fix us to the land of our fathers, and, for the most part, to the place of our birth. Accordingly, for a long series of time, the inhabitants of the several countries on the globe, knew, comparatively, little of each other. A spirit of enterprise, however, occasionally urged individuals to undertake travels, and nations to form colonies; and, of course, their knowledge of the world and of its inhabitants increased, as they proceeded. And whatever country they explored, or conquered, no people were found wholly destitute of religious ideas. The testimony of ancient writers, on this point, is so uniform, and so notorious, as not to require a particular mention.

And, now that facilities are provided for travelling, with surprising rapidity and safety, both by land and water; that, from whatever motives, the entire terraqueous globe is being traversed; that new countries are being discovered, and old countries more thoroughly explored; and that we are becoming acquainted with all nations and tribes of the human family, both civilized and barbarous, what is the fact, as to the universality of religious notions and feelings? We have seen that there was no section of the ancient world atheistical: and where now can be found a whole people, totally destitute of religious ideas, hopes, and fears? It is highly probable, that an entire people of this description never did exist, and could not now be found. Atheism, then, is not common in the world, nor natural to man. The child of nature is no atheist.

4. It is truly amusing and pitiable to learn how atheists account for a universality of religious belief, when they are not so ignorant or so impudent as to deny it. They tell us, that 'kings and priests conveyed it to the untutored minds of the common people, for sinister

purposes.' But has it not been found—and most vivid—where kings and priests never had a place or a name? What king or priest ever produced impressions of a Divinity or a Great Spirit, in the minds of hordes of poor wandering savages? And if they fancy that they behold him, or hear him in the elements, or in effects, the true cause of which they cannot assign; still the notion of such a Being must be previously in their minds. On no other presumption can suspicions or apprehensions of supernatural agency, in the minds of such untutored children of the desert, be accounted for.

But, "It originated in times of great ignorance, for all ignorant people are superstitious." Had religious belief been confined to periods of extreme ignorance and barbarism,—had it receded before the progressive illuminations of science and the increasing refinements of civilization, like some dense and noxious vapour before the rising sun, this objection would seem to possess a degree of plausibility. But since times of great knowledge have not banished it from amongst men; and since it does so happen, that the most profound philosophers are also the most tenacious believers and the most devout worshippers, it falls to the ground. If this objection possessed validity, Lord Bacon's maxim must be reversed, namely, "A little philosophy inclineth man's mind to atheism; but depth in philosophy bringeth men's minds about to religion."<sup>1</sup>

But, "It was produced by fear." This is a very old atheistical device, to evade an insurmountable difficulty. And the cause here assigned for religious belief is not less fictitious than the former. Why should fear have produced the notion of a God, rather than the notion of a God, fear? Why may not the well-known words of the heathen writer, *Primus in orbe Deos fecit timor*—Fear first made gods in the world—be changed into

<sup>1</sup> Essay on Atheism.



*Primus in orbe timorem fecit Deus*—God first made fear in the world? It certainly was, however, a most unaccountable thing, that any man, or body of men, should have been held in terror of a Being, of whom they had no previous notion whatever—had neither heard nor thought—an absolute non-entity!

But, it may be added, “The notion of a God has been handed down by tradition.” No doubt, the fact of the Divine existence has been a subject of traditional communication through thousands of years. But, whence arose the tradition? Who originated this opinion, which has been transmitted from father to son, and from generation to generation, beyond all historical date or antiquarian research? By what means has it reached every people of the world, and survived all the revolutions of human opinion? When we consider what the moral condition of the world has been for thousands of years, and that mankind, by reason of this condition, have had more to fear than to hope from the Deity, it is surprising that—provided the notion of a God were a chimera—they have not conspired to banish it from amongst them.

5. We may be reminded, that “the universality of an opinion is no decided proof of its correctness; and that many opinions have, ere now, obtained a general and powerful hold of the minds of men, which were afterwards shown to have had no foundation in truth.” There is much speciousness and little weight in this remark, when made with a view to invalidate the universal belief of a Deity. A general belief of any thing is a presumptive proof of its truth. “What seems true to some wise men, is somewhat probable; what seems to the most, or to all wise men, is very probable; what most men, both wise and unwise, assent unto, doth still more resemble the truth; but what men generally consent in, hath highest probability, and approaches near to demonstrable truth; so near, that it may pass for ridiculous

arrogance and self-conceitedness, or for intolerable obstinacy and perverseness, to deny it,"<sup>1</sup>

If the world, in any instance, entertained unfounded notions, of which they were at length disabused,—by what means were they undeceived? Not surely by empty declamation, or sophistical insinuation, or vulgar jests, or witty sarcasms. It was not by means such as these, that Columbus convinced the people of the Old World, that there was a fourth continent; or that Copernicus induced his cotemporaries to embrace his view of the solar system. Now, atheists find well nigh the entire world possessed of a common religious belief—the origin of which they attempt in vain to trace—and they call upon us to renounce it, to be of no belief, except what they, in the plenitude of their wisdom and benevolence, shall dictate. But on what grounds do they make this demand upon us? What voyage of discovery has put them in possession of the grand secret, which they pretend to have found out? By what process of investigation have they ascertained that throughout the universe there is nothing but matter?—that immense space is a vacuum, as to spiritual existence?

Nothing short of actual demonstration that there is no God, should induce any sane man to turn atheist: and we have looked, without success, into the ablest atheistical writings, for the shadow of such a demonstration. Demonstration! An *honest argument* was never yet framed, sufficiently conclusive to shake the faith of an intelligent believer. And ignorant and impudent assertions,—inuendoes against kings, priests, and saints,—revilings and blasphemies, are not likely to entice honest-minded men to yield up their well-founded and long-cherished confidence, to become the disciples of masters who employ such shallow artifices, to proselyte them to their senseless and baseless fancies.

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, quoted from Barrow's Sermons.

It may be objected, again, "Have there not been atheists in almost every country, and in every period of time?" We are far from thinking that all the persons, in ancient and modern times—from Leucippus and Democritus to Spinoza and others—who have proclaimed themselves atheists, avowed a disbelief in what they in their consciences believed: it would be unjust and uncharitable to charge them with absolute falsehood, to pronounce them wilful liars. But that such persons have been *few, very few*—not in the proportion to the rest of mankind, of one to ten thousand—is a cause for thankfulness to all who are lovers of truth and righteousness. And it is probable that some of this few *pretended* merely to be unbelievers; that they were one thing in appearance, and another in reality; that they "would not let belief lay hold of them" against their inclinations and passions; that their convictions did not father their boastings; that their consciences and their lips told different tales. At any rate, an inference to this effect may be justly deduced from the confessions and recantations of some atheists, towards the close of life. And, it should not be forgotten, that even amongst those disbelievers, to whom we are bound, in fairness, to concede sincerity, great differences of opinion have ever prevailed, proving, that, with all their high and splendid notions of themselves, and their uncharitableness and contempt of others, they have yet discoveries to make, disputes to settle amongst themselves, and the *ne plus ultra*—the farthest or last point—of human inquiry to attain. It is with peculiar propriety, therefore, that atheists boast of their numbers, of their honesty, and of their unanimity!

7. But, it may be further objected, "If common opinion prove any thing for the existence of a God, it proves too much, since the common opinion, through *many ages*, and in vast countries, was in favour of a *plurality of gods*; and, therefore, to be consistent, they



who avail themselves of the argument founded on common consent, should adopt the polytheistic creed of the ancients." From polytheism itself is derived an unanswerable argument for a deity. There is a wide difference between believing in many gods, and believing in none. There is more reason in the former, than in the latter. It is easier to conceive, that the world originated in the combined wisdom and power of a number of gods, than that it had no beginning; or, than that it was self-produced; or, than that it was brought into existence by some unintelligent principle of matter, or, than that no God made it. Polytheism is, nothing else, than the truth of the one God turned into a lie. The grossest idolatry is only the substitution of sensible images, for an invisible divinity. And both are a miserable expedient of mankind, to get rid of the labour of abstruse thinking; to substitute sight for faith; and to form a God after their own imaginations, and indulgent to their corrupt passions.

A genuine philanthropist cannot survey the state of the ancient pagan world, without dropping a tear, or heaving a sigh, over the degraded condition of human nature, which it exhibits. There he will see personifications of the worst passions of man, prostrating before them, in senseless homage, some of the finest intellects; whole nations devoted to the service of thousands of imaginary deities, having their symbols in all kinds of grotesque images, the works of men's hands; the grossest impurities blended with the most childish follies, forming an exhibition, disgusting in the extreme, and bearing the dignified name of worship! The religious sense was exceedingly vivid, in the minds of the ancient heathens; but, it was perverted and prostituted. There were some amongst them more enlightened than the rest, who despised the popular superstitions, and maintained the existence of a Divinity: and even the populace, themselves, believed, that one of their deities was

power, a universal and total dereliction? What people of antiquity were without an object of religious veneration? Civilized or barbarous, learned or illiterate, powerful or powerless, a total disbelief, or obliviousness of a Divinity can be charged upon no people, of whom we have a knowledge. They had "gods many and lords many." And rather than have no God, they worshipped the noblest and the meanest objects in Nature,—the luminaries of heaven and the reptiles of earth,—animals and vegetables. The student of ancient history needs not to be reminded, to what a marvellous extent, this degrading and disgusting practice proceeded: and the religious inquirer will perceive in it, a restless and disquieting moral instinct, deeply lodged in our nature; a witness for God, bearing its testimony, in concurrence with myriads of voices, by which the creation proclaims its Author; man feeling after his Maker, 'if haply he might find him.'

We cannot admit, that the religious statistics of the world, at the present time, exhibit a single fact, from which the most sanguine atheist can justly infer the final triumph of his cause. Considering the human family, as a whole, their tendency is the direct reverse of atheistical. Incorrect and dishonourable apprehensions of God; disaffection and disobedience to him; in short, a practical disregard and denial of him, exists every where,—because, every where, human nature has lost its poise: but, if we mistake not, a speculative rejection of the Deity is contemplated, by the generality of mankind, with abhorrence. And dark and lowering as is the aspect of the world, in some quarters of the moral hemisphere, we are far from thinking, that these clouds foretoken a general and perpetual night;—and such would atheism prove to all our comforts and prospects:—they are only morning clouds, exhalations from the receding night, in seeming contention with the rising sun, and soon to be for ever dispersed by his all-penetrating and powerful beams.

## CHAPTER V.

### ATHEISM AT WAR WITH THE MORAL SENSE OF HUMAN NATURE.

1. THERE are peculiarities about man, which distinguish him from all other creatures ; give him a manifest pre-eminence above the entire brute creation ; reprove and refute the notion, that he is a mere animal, the last link in the ascending scale of animal existence ; and attach an importance to him, not easily described. There is his body, with its great capabilities, its symmetry and beauty, its " human face divine." There is his faculty of speech, with the exquisite apparatus of means requisite to it. There is his rationality, or mind, by which he can review the past, and anticipate the future ; traverse the heavens, and explore the earth ; and ascend the long chain of causes and effects, until he reach the great uncaused Cause of all. There is his consciousness, which insulates him amidst thousands of his own species, or in the bosom of his own family, and makes him a world within himself. There is that mysterious principle of his nature, called a moral sense, or religious feeling, which frequently refers him to an Invisible Power, to the distinction between right and wrong, to an unseen world and a future state of being ; and which begets " thoughts which wander through eternity," and sighs after an immortal existence.

———" how august,  
How complicate, how wonderful is man !"



first, it is likely, families lived apart, until they multiplied into large tribes ; these tribes, again intermixed, to compose still larger communities ; and, finally, these communities united, to form extensive nations. Thus slow and gradual was the progress, from a patriarch's family, to a vast and powerful nation : not unlike the rise and growth of some small streamlets, which, meandering through extensive countries, and receiving, in their course, several tributary waters, by and by, form a junction ; and a deep and expansive lake, or sea, is the result.

The increase of civilization would, doubtless, keep pace with the augmentation of numbers ; and this increase would be marked, by the multiplication of the arts and conveniences of life ; by founding cities, enacting laws, appointing magistrates ; and, not less, by erecting temples, instituting sacrifices, and appointing priests. External religious institutions would not, in the case supposed, be necessary to produce religious ideas or feelings ; but, these already existing, would give rise to the institutions : in fact, render them indispensable. The civil platform would be incomplete, without provision being made for the honor of some Divinity. That Divinity might be different amongst different people ; but, from the religious instinct, deeply radicated in human nature, no people, in such circumstances, would be atheists. An example, it is presumed, does not exist, in the annals of the world, to contravene and neutralize this statement.

3. As new nations invariably make provision for religion, so it is observable, that old nations never permanently renounce it. An instance of this kind is unknown on the page of history. They may enlarge or contract their boundaries ; abrogate obsolete laws, or institute new ones ; become more or less enlightened *in philosophy*, and expert in the arts ; change their *religious creed*, and adopt a new object of religious

veneration, and a new ritual of worship : but, they will not, they cannot, entirely and permanently, dispense with religion:—their nature, their senses, their wants and weaknesses, their hopes and fears, their political and social interests forbid it. And if—as Rollin observes, speaking of the nations of antiquity—some few persons, depraved by bad philosophy, presumed, from time to time, to rise up against this doctrine, (that is, the doctrine of the Divine existence) they were immediately disclaimed by the public voice. They continued singular and alone, without making parties, or forming sects : the whole weight of the public authority fell upon them ; a price was set upon their heads ; whilst they were universally regarded as execrable persons, the bane of civil society, with whom it was criminal to have any kind of commerce.<sup>1</sup>

This representation of the treatment of some ancient atheists, is sustained by well-authenticated facts : for, incredible as it may seem, atheism has had its martyrs ! To persecute men—fine, imprison, banish, burn them—for their speculative opinions, whether political or religious, seems to us as unjust, as it is unwise. But, where it does appear, to enlightened and deliberative rulers of a community, that the *propagation* of such sentiments would be destructive of all authority, whether divine or human ; that it would confound virtue and vice, or reduce them to matters of mere opinion ; that it would hold out impunity—if they escaped human detection—to the worst of crimes ; that it would dissolve the very frame-work, tear up the very foundations of society ; that, in short, it would annihilate—nor leave a wreck behind—our hearths and altars ;—we are not sure, in that case, that the strong arm of the law would not be beneficially employed, in extinguishing the cause of so much misery to a nation. Perhaps,

<sup>1</sup> Ancient History, Vol. I., Introduction.

And why may we not add the following line, as true as it is beautiful?—

“How passing wonder *He* who made him such!”<sup>1</sup>

2. If, in surveying the various departments of Nature, we discovered a property, or tendency, peculiar and common to any one department, we should have little or no difficulty in understanding, that such property, or tendency, was a law of Nature; not a mere adventitious circumstance, but something which entered into the design and calculation of the Author of Nature—be that Author who or what he may—something coexistent and commensurate with that part of the universe. Thus, we say, that heat is a property of fire; that gravity is a law of matter; that instinct is a law of animal existence. And, that we found heat, and gravity, and instinct, wherever we found fire, and matter, and animal life, would be ample proof to us, that they were original principles of the things to which they belonged.

3. Now, it is on this ground, that we claim for that peculiarity of our nature, by which we are moral and accountable beings, an original property, principle, or law. And, in whatever age, or part of the world, or grade in society, or degree of civilization, or circumstances of life, we contemplate man, we shall find in his bosom that mysterious something called conscience. It is not adventitious to human nature,—it is essential to it; it is a part of itself; it is indispensable to make up the entire man. It may be differently developed, may be more or less influential, may be enfeebled or strengthened, according to circumstances: but, there it is; every man is conscious of its existence within him; and we can no more get rid of it, than we can shake off our identity.

4. Is the existence of such a property, principle, or law of our nature doubted? How, then, is the uniform-

<sup>1</sup> Young's Night Thoughts.



ity of its appearance to be accounted for? Where is the tribe of men; where is the individual man, who has not, within his bosom, something which occasionally accuses or excuses him? It is as difficult to find a rational human being whose bosom is a total blank, in this respect, as it is to find a man without the ordinary feelings of his kind. A reference to a Deity; a distinction between right and wrong; an uneasiness, after the commission of certain acts, and a satisfaction in the review of others, is as much a part of human nature, as that our intellectual faculties, or our animal passions, are a part of it. This reference may be attended with no practical advantage; and this distinction may achieve nothing for virtue; and this review, whether of good or evil, for pleasure or pain, may impart no specific direction to our future goings: but, they are a part of our moral constitution,—they are common to our species.

That we are not, indeed, what we ought to be; that our convictions do not sway us; that our knowledge is not always, nor equally, influential; that our best purposes are often as evanescent as a summer's cloud, must be admitted. But, it will be admitted, too, that every man feels he should be otherwise; that his passions ought not to extinguish his convictions; that his knowledge of duty should be followed by the practice of it; and, that purposes of any thing good and commendable in itself, or beneficial to others, should not fail of execution. Thus, there is within us a witness for God, whose voice *will* be heard; a directing ray, shining amidst the confusion and darkness of our disordered minds; a law written upon our hearts, in characters not to be misunderstood, or effaced.

5. "We are plainly constituted such sort of creatures," says Dr. Butler, "as to reflect upon our own nature. The mind can take a view of what passes within itself, its propensions, aversions, passions, affections, as respecting *such objects*, and in such degrees; and of the

several actions consequent thereupon. In this survey it approves of one, disapproves of another, and towards a third is affected in neither of these ways, but is quite indifferent. This principle in man, by which he approves or disapproves his heart, temper, and actions, is Conscience; for this is the strict sense of the word, though sometimes it is used so as to take in more: and that this faculty tends to restrain men from doing mischief to each other, and leads them to do good, is too manifest to need being insisted upon. Thus a parent has the affection of love to his children: this leads him to take care of, to educate, to make due provision for them; the natural affection leads to this: but the reflection that it is his proper business, what belongs to him, that it is right and commendable so to do; this added to the affection becomes a much more settled principle, and carries him on through more labour and difficulties for the sake of his children, than he would undergo from that affection alone, if he thought it, and the course of action it led to, either indifferent or criminal. Indeed, it is impossible to do that which is good and not approve of it; for which reason they are frequently not considered as distinct, though they really are; for men often approve of the actions of others which they will not imitate, and likewise do that which they approve not. It cannot possibly be denied that there is this principle of reflection or conscience in human nature. Suppose a man to relieve an innocent person in great distress; suppose the same man afterwards, in the fury of anger, to do the greatest mischief to a person who had given no just cause of offence; to aggravate the injury, add the circumstances of former friendship and obligation from the injured person; let the man who is supposed to have done these two different actions, coolly reflect upon them afterwards, without regard to their consequences to himself; to assert that any common man would be affected in the same way towards the



different actions, that he would make no distinction between them, but approve or disapprove them equally, is too glaring a falsity to need being confuted."

6. There is, then, in human nature itself, an original moral instinct, an original faculty of the mind, called conscience, which pronounces a verdict against atheism, and this is independent of time and circumstances. Man is not an atheist from any dictate or impulse of his nature; and to become one, he must do violence to a known and felt law of his bosom. And not only in adopting the unnatural notion, that there is no God, does he commit an outrage upon himself; he does it, too, in living as if there were none. And what an argument does such an instinct, or sense, furnish for the existence of a Deity! The eye has not a more direct and obvious relation to light, nor the ear to sound, than conscience has to a Supreme Ruler of the universe. Deny his existence and his moral rule, and our own nature presents us with an insolvable enigma. We can understand why other peculiarities of our nature are implanted within us—the uses which they serve, and the objects on which they terminate—but what conscience means, or why it is a part of ourselves, will puzzle a sage to explain, if there be no Lord of conscience; if we are not accountable beings; if all actions are alike indifferent, and all hopes and fears of a future retributive existence groundless.

7. All atheists are decided opponents of this view of conscience, because they are well aware that it furnishes a powerful argument for the existence and government of God. The very fact that there is in human nature, a faculty which makes us, even against ourselves, a kind of religious beings,—which compels a reference to a Deity, when proud and tumultuous passions would allow him an existence and interference, neither on

appointed me to deliver at the Anniversary of the American Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, in the City of New York, on the 1st of September, 1811. Sermons.—Sermon I. delivered on the 1st of September, 1811.

earth nor in heaven—which sits as a Judge, and passes a sentence of approval or condemnation, upon principles and actions, which neither are, nor can be, cognizant to any mortal but ourselves; and which diffuses through our bosoms, “on the one hand, that felt complacency which is distilled like some precious elixir upon the heart, by the recollection of virtuous deeds and virtuous sacrifices; and on the other hand, those feelings of remorse which are attendant upon wickedness, and wherewith, as if by the whip of a secret tormentor, the heart of every conscious sinner is agonized;”—we repeat, this very fact sets at rest the question of a Deity, with every sober-minded, honest individual.

8. What examples and illustrations of the power and supremacy of conscience—whether for joy or sorrow—might not be selected from the records of human experience! Man’s whole intelligent life is little else than alternations of pleasure or pain, in the review of the good or the evil, of which he is the author. And, if this observation will not apply equally to all persons, nor alike to all the periods of any person’s life; if exceptions must be made, in relation to some individuals who seem to have become awful specimens of moral induration, and in reference to some seasons which admit not of reflection; yet it will apply to the generality of mankind, and to those hours of quiet, contemplative seclusion, when our thoughts turn upon ourselves; and when what we have been, or what we are, saddens or solaces us; produces a tempest, or a sunshine, in our bosoms; fills us with anguish and dismay, or with delight and hope. And all this will be irrespective of the frowns, or the smiles, of our fellow-creatures; of punishment; or reward from men; of worldly loss or worldly gain, in every possible sense of the terms.

9. From this vicegerent of the Deity, this righteous

and faithful monitor within us, this sacred oracle, whose responses

\* Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven,'<sup>1</sup>

has arisen, the general and almost invariable consentaneousness of mankind, on the subject of religion; that men, under all the possible circumstances of life, are even forward to believe that there is a God; that he takes cognizance of our behaviour towards himself, and towards each other; and that bliss or pain, honour or infamy awaits us, in no distant futurity, according to our character and conduct in the present life. These grand and affecting sentiments are the unsophisticated dictates of every human bosom. They may be compared to the mystic characters of some ancient pyramid, which, having resisted the influence of the elements for thousands of years, teach every passing traveller who will be at the trouble to decypher them, what hand raised the edifice, and placed on it the inscription; and which bid fair to outlive all adverse changes, 'till time itself shall be no more.

10. Viewing this chapter in connection with the preceding one, we think it may justly be inferred that atheism never can become general, unless, by some mysterious consentaneousness, the entire family of man should abjure, at once, their intellectual and moral nature, should lay aside their humanity and turn brutes. But what shadow of reason is there for conjecturing that this will ever occur? Because a few persons discover mental aberration, or lay violent hands upon their own life, is no reason for supposing that all the world are to become madmen, or suicides. The history of past ages and generations contains nothing to indicate the eventual universality of atheistical notions. What period of time, during six thousand years, has presented, as to a recognition, in some way or other, of a supreme

<sup>1</sup> Young's Night Thoughts.



power, a universal and total dereliction? What people of antiquity were without an object of religious veneration? Civilized or barbarous, learned or illiterate, powerful or powerless, a total disbelief, or obliviousness of a Divinity can be charged upon no people, of whom we have a knowledge. They had "gods many and lords many." And rather than have no God, they worshipped the noblest and the meanest objects in Nature,—the luminaries of heaven and the reptiles of earth,—animals and vegetables. The student of ancient history needs not to be reminded, to what a marvellous extent, this degrading and disgusting practice proceeded: and the religious inquirer will perceive in it, a restless and disquieting moral instinct, deeply lodged in our nature; a witness for God, bearing its testimony, in concurrence with myriads of voices, by which the creation proclaims its Author; man feeling after his Maker, 'if haply he might find him.'

We cannot admit, that the religious statistics of the world, at the present time, exhibit a single fact, from which the most sanguine atheist can justly infer the final triumph of his cause. Considering the human family, as a whole, their tendency is the direct reverse of atheistical. Incorrect and dishonourable apprehensions of God; disaffection and disobedience to him; in short, a practical disregard and denial of him, exists every where,—because, every where, human nature has lost its poise: but, if we mistake not, a speculative rejection of the Deity is contemplated, by the generality of mankind, with abhorrence. And dark and lowering as is the aspect of the world, in some quarters of the moral hemisphere, we are far from thinking, that these clouds foretoken a general and perpetual night;—and such would atheism prove to all our comforts and prospects:—they are only morning clouds, exhalations from *the receding* night, in seeming contention with *the rising sun*, and soon to be for ever dispersed by his all-penetrating and powerful beams.

## CHAPTER VI.

## ATHEISM DESTRUCTIVE OF SOCIAL AND CIVIL SOCIETY.

1. THERE are abundant and indubitable proofs, that we are not designed, or adapted, for an isolated existence ; to live by ourselves, or to ourselves ; to be hermits, misanthropes, solitary wanderers :—but, for society ; to form alliances ; to reciprocate kindly offices ; and, conjointly, to execute—what would appear to be—the necessary affairs of life.

We have no toleration for that theory, which would teach us to view ourselves, as so many ferocious beasts, or untamed savages, who contemplate each other with a fell hate and grim visage, and dare not attempt mutual intercourse, without the risk of a deadly strife. The best refutation of such a theory is our constitution and habits. We are, from our nature, social beings, in a high degree ; we instinctively seek communion with each other ; and many of the conveniences and comforts of life are secured by “brethren dwelling together in unity.”

2. The history of the rise and progress of civil communities is peculiarly interesting : for political bodies, like individual members of those bodies, have their birth, growth, maturity, and decay. We know not, that the majority of the human family existed, at any time, as marauders, and in a state of absolute barbarism ; yet, aggregation was, probably, slow, although, great and manifest advantages arose, as it proceeded. At



first, it is likely, families lived apart, until they multiplied into large tribes ; these tribes, again intermixed, to compose still larger communities ; and, finally, these communities united, to form extensive nations. Thus slow and gradual was the progress, from a patriarch's family, to a vast and powerful nation : not unlike the rise and growth of some small streamlets, which, meandering through extensive countries, and receiving, in their course, several tributary waters, by and by, form a junction ; and a deep and expansive lake, or sea, is the result.

The increase of civilization would, doubtless, keep pace with the augmentation of numbers ; and this increase would be marked, by the multiplication of the arts and conveniences of life ; by founding cities, enacting laws, appointing magistrates ; and, not less, by erecting temples, instituting sacrifices, and appointing priests. External religious institutions would not, in the case supposed, be necessary to produce religious ideas or feelings ; but, these already existing, would give rise to the institutions : in fact, render them indispensable. The civil platform would be incomplete, without provision being made for the honor of some Divinity. That Divinity might be different amongst different people ; but, from the religious instinct, deeply radicated in human nature, no people, in such circumstances, would be atheists. An example, it is presumed, does not exist, in the annals of the world, to contravene and neutralize this statement.

3. As new nations invariably make provision for religion, so it is observable, that old nations never permanently renounce it. An instance of this kind is unknown on the page of history. They may enlarge or contract their boundaries ; abrogate obsolete laws, or institute new ones ; become more or less enlightened *in philosophy*, and expert in the arts ; change their *religious creed*, and adopt a new object of religious

reverence, and a new ritual of worship : but, they will not, they cannot, entirely and permanently, dispense with religion:—their nature, their senses, their wants and weaknesses, their hopes and fears, their political and social interests forbid it. And if—as Rollin observes, speaking of the nations of antiquity—some few persons, depraved by bad philosophy, presumed, from time to time, to rise up against this doctrine, (that is, the doctrine of the Divine existence) they were immediately disclaimed by the public voice. They continued singular and alone, without making parties, or forming sects : the whole weight of the public authority fell upon them ; a price was set upon their heads ; whilst they were universally regarded as execrable persons, the bane of civil society, with whom it was criminal to have any kind of commerce.<sup>1</sup>

This representation of the treatment of some ancient atheists, is sustained by well-authenticated facts : for, incredible as it may seem, atheism has had its martyrs ! To persecute men—fine, imprison, banish, burn them—for their speculative opinions, whether political or religious, seems to us as unjust, as it is unwise. But, where it does appear, to enlightened and deliberative rulers of a community, that the *propagation* of such sentiments would be destructive of all authority, whether divine or human ; that it would confound virtue and vice, or reduce them to matters of mere opinion ; that it would hold out impunity—if they escaped human detection—to the worst of crimes ; that it would dissolve the very frame-work, tear up the very foundations of society ; that, in short, it would annihilate—nor leave a wreck behind—our hearths and altars ;—we are not sure, in that case, that the strong arm of the law would not be beneficially employed, in extinguishing the cause of so much misery to a nation. Perhaps,

<sup>1</sup> Ancient History, Vol. I., Introduction.

the adoption of other means would prove a better expedient, and be more in accordance with what ought to be the spirit of every modification of religion. But, be that as it may, we learn from the treatment experienced by atheists, in ages gone by, the sense which bodies of men, some of them highly distinguished for their love of learning and liberty, almost to idolatry, have ever entertained of atheistic sentiments, and the apprehensions which they felt of the authors of them.

4. If, then, persons who deny the existence of a God, and renounce all religious belief, have ever been, at least virtually, renounced by the rest of mankind—as well-regulated communities cast off their offending members, like so many pernicious and disgusting excrecences—what is there in modern atheism, to recommend it to our acceptance; or to induce us to hold fellowship with its disciples? Who would embrace opinions so ill-founded as atheism, which all the successive generations of mankind have rejected as false, dangerous, and infamous? And who would wish to reside amongst a people, governed by such opinions? A community of atheists! And what then? A community of libertines, robbers, cut-throats. Others, indeed, may be of this description; but not consistently, not without fear and trembling. But, it is quite consistent in an atheist to be, or to do, whatever pleases or suits him. I know not what, in any course, can beget an apprehension in his bosom, save the probability of the gallows. And who perpetrates crimes, without the hope, at least, of escaping detection? The greatest good he can obtain is the gratification of his animal passions: and why should he not indulge them? The best art he can practice, to obtain the means of indulgence, is theft: and why should he not steal? The safest asylum, for many, is the grave: and why should he not destroy himself, or others! *Human life is, in his view, but of little importance: and, who would drag on through years of deep calamity,*



when a momentary pang would end the whole? And why should not one man destroy another, who may be an annoyance to him; or who, for example, may stand between him and his expectations?

If there be no reward for virtue, but in the present world, what motive to virtuous conduct can exist, where the reward is distant and uncertain? And, if there be no punishment for vice, but here; what can restrain or intimidate the vicious, when temptation urges; and urges too, that detection and punishment are next to impossible? Indeed, there are thousands of virtuous doings, for which there can be no reward in this life; and thousands of vicious doings, which no power on earth can descry and visit. Obliterate, then, in the public mind, the affecting sentiment of a watchful, governing, and retributive Deity: cut off the prospect of a future state of being, in which are dispensed rewards and punishments, to good and bad men, respectively, according to their principles and practices, in the present life: subject all human conduct to mere human supervision; and make all mankind accountable only to each other, or to themselves: let none but immediate temporal good or evil result to them, from their character and conduct; and the moralities and decencies of life will chiefly be at an end; justice, truth, and goodness will hardly exist amongst men; and the world will become one entire scene of immorality and villainy.

5. It were to be wished, that there was less in the frame of society, both political and religious, to call forth the objections of atheists, and to give them emphasis and plausibleness with those, who are least able to detect their sophistical and insidious nature and ruinous tendency; and whom they are most likely to ensnare and destroy. No doubt, there is much in political and religious communities and institutions, which has descended from ages of ignorance and barbarism; much, which will *not bear to be canvassed, without an exposure of its ab-*

surdity and inutility ; much useless lumber, which states and churches will do well to cast away ; much, which must be got rid of, to preserve the whole from wreck. But, are we to be told, that all authority is usurpation, and all government oppression ? that all religion is only state policy ? that all ministers of religion are hypocrites and impostors ? that no man is really influenced by his religious sentiments ? and, that the regeneration and happiness of the world must be brought about, by the uprooting of all existing opinions and institutions ?

The extravagance of these impudent and impious assertions refutes them. Can any society hold together, without rule ? and can there be rule, without authority ? It matters not what the person, or persons, may be called, in whom the authority resides, and by whom the rule is exercised ; authority must be lodged somewhere, rule must be administered by some recognized power. Without this, there can be no social order, no real liberty, no certain security throughout a country ; the powerful would oppress the feeble ; brute force would be the only law ; might, and not right, would determine every question ; and the revolutions of society would be as rapid as the revolutions of the seasons, and inconceivably ruinous. That there are capricious, tyrannical, and oppressive princes is not denied ; but they are not necessarily so, because they are princes. There is no enchantment in the name, or office, of princes, to make them bad or good : and, if some have, as it is contended, proved a curse to the countries over which they presided ; others have proved a distinguished blessing. It is an immense concession to religion, that it should be thought necessary to civil government ; it is the very point for which we contend. But, let it be remembered, that princes can forge no religious chains for their subjects, which will not equally bind themselves. We could advert to many examples, as a proof of this. *Religion was something more than a piece of state policy—a*



political stratagem—with the detestable tyrants of imperial Rome, when, as it is expressed, they were “tempest-driven by remorse and fear;” were agonized in reviewing the past, and in anticipating the future. Caligula, Nero, and Domitian are striking proofs, that governors, no less than the governed, apprehend a reality in religion, and believe that “there is a God who judgeth in the earth.”

There are, no doubt, not a few proud, worldly-minded, self-seeking ministers of religion, who possess neither mental nor moral qualifications for their profession; whose only object is the emoluments of their office; who do not believe, understand, nor practice, the religion which they profess to teach; and whose censure is ever legible in the ignorance, indifference, and irreligion of their congregations. But are all ministers of religion of this description? Are the exceptions so few, as to justify a general condemnation? There are thousands serving at the altars of religion, who are an honor to human nature, an ornament to society, a blessing to their flocks, and benefactors to the world. Surely, all the talents, learning, philosophy, honesty, and excellence of mankind are not confined to atheists! Religion has, indeed, too often been made subservient to political purposes; and it is to be lamented that it does not, as it ought, influence those who profess it; but what good thing has not been abused? what cause has not been betrayed?

To say that no man is influenced by his religious belief, is to utter a falsehood in the face of the sun—to contradict the testimony of many, whose character for honesty and veracity will bear the strictest scrutiny. There are motives of action which religion alone can supply. A full persuasion, that there is a God; that we are accountable to him; that his eye is ever upon us; that we are soon to receive his smile or his frown, a *blessing or a curse*, as we have been pleasing or dis-

pleasing to him, is adapted, beyond every thing else, to restrain or stimulate us—to inspire us with fear or hope. And under its influence, we shall be and do the same in the dark, as in the day; in solitude, as in society; surrounded by temptation, as when no enticement to evil is present. An atheist must, necessarily, be a stranger to religious motives of every kind: and with as much propriety does he deny their existence and influence in the mind, as that a blind man should deny the distinction of colours, or a deaf man the harmony of sounds. “Wisdom is justified of her children.” Regenerate and bless the world, by uprooting all religious opinions and institutions! They who are acquainted with the secrets—the watch-words—of atheists, perfectly understand what this means. It is, in short, to make all men atheists in religion and anarchists in politics. It would hardly seem, at first, that there is an intimate connection between these—or connection at all: but, it does so happen, that atheists are usually anarchists, and anarchists atheists. The transition from the one character to the other, either way, is short and easy. Atheists would have no distinctions in society; all its members must be on a level! But, where shall we look for a sample of such an equality? In the ancient Grecian states, where liberty was idolized, nothing of the kind ever existed. Amongst a horde of savages, he who possesses the greatest bodily strength, or the most fluent tongue, will be the chief. They would have a division of property, another “Agrarian law,” enacted and enforced—a community of goods! A convenient measure, no doubt, for paupers and idlers; but it would be unnatural, violent, and impossible. Something of the kind might exist amongst a single band—whether savage or civilized—of attached friends; but a great nation never could be converted into a joint-stock company. And were it practicable, by some desperate *movement of the mob*—by some wanton and outrageous

exercise of brute force—to bring about a perfect equality of rank and property amongst a civilized people, such an equality could not continue for twelve months. The governors and the governed, John and his master, the pauper and the proprietor would change sides: but these distinctions would speedily be revived. The man of understanding and the blockhead, the industrious and the indolent, the excellent and the worthless, never can be on a parity, in a society of sane and decent persons, for any length of time.

6. It has ceased, therefore, to be problematical with discerning sober-minded men, whether a universal atheism and organized society can co-exist, in the same country. They have made up their minds, that they are utterly incompatible; that, whatever may be pretended, the prevalence of atheistical notions must work the ruin of every social compact; and, that the commonweal could no more survive, amidst the tumultuousness of atheistical disorder, than a lighted taper can live, unprotected, during the fitfulness of the tempest.

Suppose a vast aggregation of mankind, possessed of all our present human-nature passions; destitute of the shadow of a belief in a Supreme Governor; without any certain and obligatory moral rule; displaced from under the influence of fear and hope, as to a future state of existence; with the forms of piety laid aside, the sabbath abolished, the sanction of religion withdrawn from the administration of the laws, and the last warning voice of conscience uttered,—what would be the place of their residence but a Pandemonium? Were we ever to become the dupes of atheism, we should speedily become its victims; for, embracing it, we should embrace a Medusa's head, every hair of which would prove a serpent, to destroy us. Better would it be, to encounter all the plagues of Egypt at once, than that such a foul and fatal evil, such an infernal device, should spread *throughout the land*.



We can best assure ourselves, in any given case, what effect a cause will produce, by knowing what it has produced. Experience is a safe guide ; and it will conduct to a satisfactory conclusion here. To describe what atheism produced, when allied with the civil power of a country, a tale of horror must be unfolded, at the recital of which humanity would shudder, and the fiercest savage turn pale. The history of atheistical France needs not to be narrated ; its dreadful details are extensively and minutely known. A well known American writer has justly observed, " France during that period (*the period in which atheism obtained the ascendancy*) was a theatre of crimes, which, after all preceding perpetrations, excited in the mind of every spectator amazement and horror. The miseries suffered by that single nation changed all the histories of the preceding sufferings of mankind into idle tales, and were enhanced and multiplied without a precedent, without number, and without a name. The kingdom appeared to be changed into one great prison ; the inhabitants converted into felons ; and the common doom of mankind commuted for the violence of the sword, the bayonet, the sucking-boat, and guillotine. To a contemplative man, it seemed, for a season, as if the knell of the whole nation was being tolled, and the world summoned to its execution and its funeral. Within the short time of ten years, not less than three millions of human beings are supposed to have perished, in that single country, by the influence of atheism."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Dwight's Works, Vol. i. Sermon 3.

## CHAPTER VII.

ATHEISM SHOWN TO POSSESS A DIRECT IMMORAL  
TENDENCY.

1. WERE any theory proposed, for banishing from the world all the diseases to which our common nature is subject; although, when reduced to experiment, it should fail to effect what was expected, yet, should it diminish the number or abate the virulency of those maladies, it would be hailed by us, as an important expedient. But if, on the contrary, it should turn out, that, instead of diminishing, it multiplied them; and, instead of abating their malignity, it increased it, we should all unite in pronouncing it a tremendous evil, and be deeply anxious to excite towards it universal detestation.

Now, it is by this test, that we could wish theism and atheism—the religious and the anti-religious schemes—to be tried. That moral derangement exists in the world; that things are not what they ought to be, in a moral point of view; that, to say nothing of a Deity, and of duties owing to him, mankind are not acting towards each other, as it would seem to become them, few will be found to deny. We will not enquire, how the present state of the world occurred; whether it be necessary to human nature, or was superinduced, it is deplorably bad, and needs emendation. And, whatever contributes to restrain and moderate our passions, to *subject our animal to our intellectual and moral nature,*



to establish in our minds a supreme respect for whatever is excellent, and to induce in our lives the uniform exercise of justice, truth, and goodness, contributes, in the same degree, to bring about that emendation, to bless the world by renovating its spirit and practice. Now, if we have not undertaken to shew, that theism has this tendency, the title of this chapter pledges us to prove, that atheism has a directly opposite tendency.

2. Many fine things are said of atheism; as, for example, that it is so simple, so rational, so well adapted to recover the world from its present state of unhingement, both moral and political! But, we know, too, that gorgeous descriptions amount to nothing; that words are wind; that opinions and facts are often at variance; and that no reasoning built upon unsound premises can evolve just and incontrovertible conclusions. A modicum of logic and rhetoric, with a considerable portion of sophistry, will enable an adroit advocate to confound right and wrong, truth and error; to "make the worse appear the better reason;" and to secure for his cause, although utterly rotten, a verdict in the breasts of even a sensible and upright jury. But, there is one in the court not deceived. The learned Judge looks at the facts of the case; he sifts, in his well-disciplined and perspicacious mind, the character of the witnesses and the nature of their testimony; he perceives that the whole is a trumped-up affair, in the success of which, the parties concerned, are deeply interested; he exposes the falsehood and trickery employed, to secure for it a triumphant issue; and feels assured, that the verdict of the jury should be in accordance with his own convictions.

Now, let the persons who are in danger of becoming the dupes of atheists and atheism imitate, so far as they are able, the conduct of this judge, and ask themselves, What are the facts by which it is attempted to prove, that religion is altogether a mistake, or a cheat? What

is the character of the persons, who would proselyte us to their opinions? And what arguments do they employ, to produce conviction? I am greatly deceived, if the wary inquirers will not discover, that their pretended facts are impudent assumptions; that their character is, at least, doubtful; that their arguments are far-fetched and inconclusive; and, that there is some latent feeling prompting all their efforts, unconnected with the love of truth, or with the interests of society.

3. For persons, who renounce a Deity, to talk of morality, of conscientiousness, of the pain of having done evil, or of the pleasure of having done good, is to misapply and pervert terms,—is nothing short of arrant hypocrisy,—is to deceive by words, which seem to drop honey, while, in fact, they distil poison. Morality!—where there is no supreme, fixed, obligatory, moral rule! Conscientiousness!—where a man's "own mind is his law, his tribunal, and his judge!" Delight, or remorse, in the review of actions which may be esteemed right or wrong, at the pleasure of the actor, which different persons may view differently, which, it may be, are long since gone by, and never can become matters of cognizance to a second person! What absurd and sophistical pretension is there in all this, if there be the shadow of truth in atheism! And, for what, except to deceive, can it be set up? To admit, that there is an original moral difference of actions; that conscience is an established power in the human bosom, to take cognizance of this difference,—that there is, according to its award, complacency in having done well, and remorse in having done ill, is to concede, to a great extent, the very point in dispute; namely, that there is a Supreme Mind, who has established this difference, implanted this principle, and deals out, even in this life, reward and punishment, respectively, to virtue and vice,—to right and wrong.

4. We charge atheistic sentiments with a demoralizing

tendency, because they hold the doctrine of a moral Governor of the world to be false. Were there no Supreme authority, no executive power in a country, there could be no government, no accountableness, no social order; every person would consult his own inclination, do what suited his convenience, and, in short, hold himself at liberty, on all occasions, to adopt what course seemed most expedient to himself, to gratify his passions, or to secure his ends. Throughout the country, the worst of villanies would be perpetrated; the powerful would every where destroy the feeble; and robberies, murders, obscenities, would prevail, without check and without punishment. Now, very similar to this particular country, would be the state of the entire world, in every moral point of view, were the opinion to obtain generally amongst mankind, that there is no supreme, rectoral supervision of our hearts and lives. We cannot, perhaps, adequately conceive, what would be the full effect, in that case, of atheistical opinions; and, it is likely, that our posterity of two or three generations would hardly experience all the evil-working of such an occurrence. But, there can be no doubt in an unprejudiced mind, that the world would proceed from bad to worse, until the whole earth would become a wide scene of every abomination.

There are tens of thousands of opportunities, occurring every day, which tempt to the indulgence of our evil passions; and which indulgence can neither be known, nor punished by our fellow-creatures, where the fear of an avenging God is the sole barrier. Suppose individuals inclined to yield to the allurements of atheism has no barrier whatever to interpose. The motives to resistance, to self-denial, which it could possibly suggest, would prove, in opposition to the impetuosity of the passions, like so many straws, thrown to obstruct the course of a mighty torrent. And nothing, in those *perilous conjunctures*, insufficient as it sometimes proves,



will be found to restrain and preserve us from the solicitation, of equal force with the thrilling recollection, "Thou God seest me." An atheist may, perchance, utter a soliloquy, during the moment of suspense and hesitation, before the commission of an evil act, like the following: "I ought not to do this, since it may injure my health, beggar my family, destroy my peace, and so forth." Now, a religious man, when placed in circumstances of danger, can say all this, as well as the atheist: but, he says, moreover; "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

5. Atheistic sentiments demoralize the subjects of them, by admitting of no permanent rule or standard of morals. Morality signifies conduct generally accordant with a known and fixed divine law, either discoverable by the light of nature, or through the medium of a written communication. Conformity to this law is virtue; deviation from it is vice. Now, while atheists are shy of denouncing morals, directly and frankly, they frequently demand, What is morality?—and insist, that it is only a matter of individual opinion. It may be very consistent in persons, who allow of no moral governor of the world; and of no eternal law of justice, truth, and goodness, by which his government is administered; and of no accountableness on the part of the human race, to reiterate questions of this kind: but, it must be remembered, that where definite views of right and wrong are not possessed; or, where those views may change, with the changing circumstances of mankind, the morals of a people can exist only in name, and even that will hardly be retained.

Suppose if two men, or two thousands, were to agree to regard morality (of which the relative duties of life are a great part) as a mere matter of opinion,—the facts of human nature, the habits of mankind, the feelings of their own breasts, would be so many *confutations of their theory*. We will suppose a number of

men, whether civilized or barbarous, who never heard of a theory of ethics ; never received a single lesson on morality ; never revolved the difference of actions ;—would they feel alike—being in no way interested parties—in beholding, alternately, and of a sudden, remarkable acts of gratitude and ingratitude, fidelity and treachery, kindness and cruelty, the assassination of a friend and the preservation of an enemy ? But, we will farther suppose them, the objects of such actions ; and will it be pretended, that they either would, or could, approve equally of these ?—that they would, or could, hold the former to be an evil, and the latter a good ? Would any man of sane mind, be equally delighted with the history of Caligula and Nero, and that of Trajan and Aurelius ? Or, would he feel the same pleasure, in perusing the biography of Robespierre, and that of Howard ? And, why would he not ? The answer to this question will prove, that certain actions are as well-fitted, and seem as necessary, to give delight to the mind, as is light to give pleasure to the eye, or food satisfaction to the appetite.

We may be reminded here, of the legalized theft of one country ; of the legalized cruelties of a second ; and of the legalized prostitution of a third. But, can it be pretended, that the theft, the cruelties, and the prostitution were ever held to be virtues in themselves, and legalized for their own sake ? No man, who lost his property by fraud, or violence, ever yet thought that he was justly dealt by ; that the robber was righteous, and to be commended, in what he did. Similar observations might be made, as to other vicious practices, which, although sanctioned by national law, could only be so sanctioned, because of some supposed national benefit to arise from them.

“Cast your eyes,” says Rousseau, “over all the *nations* of the world, and all the histories of nations. *Amid so many inhuman and absurd superstitions—*



amid that prodigious diversity of manners and characters, you will find every where the same principles and distinctions of moral good and evil. The Paganism of the ancient world produced, indeed, abominable gods, who on earth would have been shunned or punished as monsters, and who offered, as a picture of supreme happiness, only crimes to commit, and passions to satiate. But vice, armed with this sacred authority, descended in vain from the eternal abode:—she found, in the heart of man, a moral instinct to repel her. The continence of Xenocrates was admired by those who celebrated the debaucheries of Jupiter—the chaste Lucretia adored the unchaste Venus—the most intrepid Roman sacrificed to *Fear*. He invoked the god who dethroned his father, and he died without a murmur by the hand of his own. The most contemptible divinities were served by the greatest men. The holy voice of Nature, stronger than that of gods, made itself heard, and respected, and obeyed on earth, and seemed to *banish*, as it were, to the confinement of heaven, guilt and the guilty.”<sup>1</sup>

If there be any one, observes Dr. Brown, who has an interest in gathering every argument which sophistry can suggest, to prove that virtue is nothing, *and vice, therefore, nothing*, and who will strive to yield himself readily to this consolatory persuasion, it is surely the criminal who trembles beneath a weight of memory which he cannot shake off. Yet, even he who feels the power of virtue only in the torture which it inflicts, *does* still feel this power, and feels it with at least as strong conviction of its reality, as those to whom it is every moment diffusing pleasure, and who might be considered perhaps as not very rigid questioners of an illusion which they felt to be delightful. The spectral forms of superstition have, indeed, vanished; but, there

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from Dr. Brown's Lectures.

is *one spectre* which will continue to haunt the mind, as long as the mind itself is capable of guilt; and has exerted this dreadful capacity,—*the spectre of a guilty life*, which does not haunt only the darkness of a few hours of night, but comes in fearful visitations, whenever the mind has no other object before it that can engage every thought, in the most splendid scenes, and in the brightest hours of day. What enchanter is there who can come to the relief of a sufferer of this class, and put the terrifying spectre to flight? We may say to the murderer, that in poisoning his friend, to succeed a little sooner to the estate, which he knew that his friendship had bequeathed to him, he had done a deed as meritorious in itself, as if he had saved the life of his friend at the risk of his own; and that all for which there was any reason to upbraid himself was, that he had suffered his benefactor to remain so many years in the possession of means of enjoyment, which a few grains of opium or arsenic might have transferred sooner to him. We may strive to make him *laugh* at the absurdity of the scene, when on the very bed of death, that hand which had often pressed his with kindness before, seemed to press again with delight the very hand which had mixed and presented the potion. But, though we may smile—if we can smile—at such a scene as this, and point out the incongruity with as much ingenious pleasantry as if we were describing some ludicrous mistake, there will be no laughter on that *face* from which we strive to force a smile. He who felt the grasp of that hand will feel it still, and will shudder at our description; and shudder still more at the tone of jocular merriment, with which we describe what is to him so dreadful.”<sup>1</sup>

Atheism is ruinous to morals, as it places our principal happiness in the indulgence of our animal appe-

tites. There is a *summum bonum*—a chief good—which every human being, who is also a person of reflection, proposes to himself. To live is our first wish ; and to be happy, during life, is our second. Now, atheistic opinions not only reduce the term of our existence to an absolute fraction ; but, they deny to this fractional existence, the highest and noblest satisfactions of which it is susceptible. They extinguish the sun, that we may be illumined and warmed by a taper. They dry up a pure and perennial fountain, that we may sip, for an occasional moment—with the hope of slaking our thirst—at a paltry and polluted pool. They would operate a genuine Circean effect upon us ; for they would metamorphose us all into filthy swine, and send us to wallow in sties of sensuality. The historical reader does not need to be informed of the licentious atheism of Greece, during the administration of Pericles ; of Rome, during the reign of Augustus ; of England, under the second Charles ; and of France, under Louis the Sixteenth and the National Convention. The French Jacobins were mostly atheists ; and never was there such a set of villanous and debauched monsters, in any age or country. Thus, atheism produces licentiousness—the worthy offspring of a worthy parent—and licentiousness confirms atheism ; and both united, consummate human wretchedness.

7. Atheism encourages immorality, by denying a future retributive existence. If there be no Supreme Ruler of the world, no established law to which we are held amenable, no life beyond the grave ; then, of course, the doctrine of a future state of retribution—bearing the same relation to our present life which the harvest bears to the seed-time—falls to the ground. But, without inquiring, for a single moment, whether this doctrine be true or false, what is likely to be the consequence of the universal rejection of it, upon the morals of society ? *That the belief of it does not place us under a more*



powerful influence is to be regretted; but it is, beyond all other things, adapted to correct and refine us; to show us, that our duty is also our interest in an inconceivable degree; to apply with peculiar emphasis to our hearts the question, What manner of persons ought we to be? The presence of this doctrine with the mind, has often paralyzed the arm of the assassin, and preserved the life of his victim: it has often cast over the midnight revelry a deeper gloom than ever overspread the face of nature; it has often embittered, beyond endurance, the life of a villain, who did his work in secret, and defied detection, and compelled him to confess his crime, and to prefer death to life.

What, in these cases, could have produced an equal effect? What could have supplied the place of this overwhelming foreboding of a judgment to come? In such instances, and in thousands more, which must now be nameless, "the sense of an ever-present Ruler, and of an avenging Judge, is of the most awful and indispensable necessity; as it is that alone which impresses on all crimes the character of *folly*, shows that duty and interest, in every instance, coincide, and that the most prosperous career of vice, the most brilliant successes of criminality, are but an accumulation of wrath against the day of wrath."<sup>1</sup>

8. It is by thus tracing the demoralizing influence of atheism upon mankind, that its detestable character and direful tendency are perceived. And what other influence can it possibly exert? When there is an obliteration from the mind of any man, of all belief of a pervading and an omniscient Deity, of personal accountability, of another life, and of rewards and punishments; when he repudiates moral rule and moral obligation, as dreams of superstition, and a selfish expediency becomes the regulating principle of his life;

<sup>1</sup> Modern Infidelity, by the late Robert Hall.



when hope and fear cease to be inmates of his bosom, and the Epicurean doctrine of the chief good of man is fully adopted; when all this occurs, we know not what moral excellence can exist in him. An individual under these circumstances may be virtuous, but he has nothing to make him so; he admits of no Being of perfect justice, truth, and goodness, to be pleased or to be imitated; he holds himself accountable to no one, but himself: his own inclination is his only rule; he can throw the reins upon the neck of his passions, and live without restraint—except from an insufficiency in the means of indulgence—and without apprehension, except in relation to earthly considerations.

It appears, then, that atheism not only shifts the ancient land-marks of virtue, to suit its own convenience, but actually destroys them: it not only relaxes the moral habits of men, but breaks them up: it not only vitiates the life, but depraves the heart: it not only holds virtuous conduct a nugatory thing, but regards it as useless, if not pernicious. In whatever station or relation, then, an atheist is found, his sentiments place him under suspicion. The probability is, that the man's conduct will symbolize with his opinions. And this has, generally, we presume, been the case with those unhappy men, whether of ancient or modern times, who, yielding to the solicitations of an alluring scepticism, first doubted and then denied the existence of *Him*, in whom they lived, moved, and had their being.

9. Finally: As there is nothing in atheism to produce virtue—but the reverse, so there is nothing in it, to win the approval and secure the preference of virtuous minds. A sincerely religious man has no interest to achieve, in renouncing his belief in the great and good Being, whom he is wont to adore. He feels, that were a permanent *doubt* of the divine existence to obtain a lodgment in his mind, that doubt would desolate creation, *destroy every noble sentiment of his heart, annihilate*

every vestige of long and fondly-cherished hope, and, in short, make him, of all creatures, most miserable.

We do not, therefore, find the names of persons of high moral excellence, on the muster-roll of the avowed enemies of God. Their faith in his being and perfections is in proportion to their excellence, as it is the spring of it. And from the whole, it may be fairly inferred, that every man who claims to be considered an atheist, is either openly or covertly wicked; that he is under the influence of some sinister motive, and aiming at some pernicious end; that his heart is more than ordinarily corrupt; and that whatever adroitness he may evince, in concealing and garnishing his real character, a deep-rooted love of vice, and a desire of impunity in all excesses, an ensnaring fondness of eccentricities and novelties, a restless impatience of restraint, and a proud and daring defiance of authority, and the vanity of wishing to be thought superior to ordinary minds and vulgar prejudices, or some of these, must be placed amongst the causes of the bold and impious conduct we deplore.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## ATHEISM DEPRECIATES AND DEGRADES HUMAN NATURE.

1. It is recorded of Procrustes, a famous robber of Attica, a country of ancient Greece, that he fastened all who unfortunately fell into his hands, on a bed; and if they chanced to exceed this bed in length, he cut off a part of them, to equal his victims to that on which they were laid. Now, it is similarly to this, that atheists treat human nature. They find that it stands in the way of their speculations; that, to an atheistical mind, it presents an insolvable problem; and that, in fact, they must get rid of much of it, or abandon their theory. They, therefore, pare it down, to suit their own convenience; and to *what*, will appear from the following paragraphs of this chapter.

2. Mankind have ever shown a desire to magnify themselves, by exalting their extraction. To have been of mean parentage—to possess plebeian blood circulating through our veins—to have nothing of ancestry of which to boast, is thought by some, to enfeeble our claims to respectability, whatever position we occupy in society, or whatever acquisitions we make, which the world values. And, on the other hand, to have descended from some ancestor of lofty name, even should many generations have intervened between him and us; to have been born to title and estate, although now pos-

sessed of neither; to be able to trace back our connection to any thing which gives pre-eminence, or confers honourable distinction, is a sure means of procuring for ourselves, in any station or condition of life, some degree, at least, of respect and attention. This may be censurable, or commendable—there may be much of conceit and absurdity in it; but it has prevailed in all ages and throughout all nations. To have descended from a God was esteemed and coveted, as the highest distinction, amongst the ancient heathen. Throughout the eastern world, great importance is attached to birth: a man's caste is determined by his extraction. In our own, as in other countries, the vagrant Jew, a proverb and a by-word with all, boasts of his descent from faithful Abraham; and is anxious to be thought of the most honourable tribe of his people. Many instances there are of persons endeavouring, at an immense cost, to establish their pretensions to consanguinity, with nobility or royalty. We have nations investigating their origin; that deducing it from some distinguished founder, honour might accrue to themselves.

And thus the whole human family have been wont to regard themselves as the offspring of a Deity; as the production of his own creative wisdom and power. And it must be admitted, that there is something exceedingly elevating, in the belief of such an origin. But atheism forbids us this boast; and, that it might strip us the more effectually, of every pretension which can attach importance, or impart dignity, it robs us of our exalted parentage, and makes us mere creatures of chance, the spawn of the earth, or a concretion of atoms. We had no origin, or we had an origin utterly fabulous! Some cloud evolved us, or some mud ejected us from its bosom! We crept out of some mountain's side, or we crawled up from some prolific river! We are, in short, *the offspring of nothing, or of any thing, rather than of an intelligent Creator!* Into what depths of absurdity do



not men plunge, when they abandon the beaten path of truth, to follow their own imaginations!

3. Human nature has often been a subject of elaborate panegyrick. By human nature is meant all that goes to make up the entire man: and man is the noblest creature of which we have a knowledge. Viewed, indeed, with the vastness of the creation, he seems but an atom; with its duration, an ephemera; with its kindling glories, an insignificant particle of animated matter. And yet, with all this littleness, and brevity, and insignificance, there is an intrinsic excellence, a solemnity, a grandeur attaching to our nature, which gives it an inconceivable pre-eminence, over the whole unintelligent creation. We discern by the naked eye, and by the aid of the telescope to a far greater extent, globes similar to our own, revolving in infinite space; but they are all mere matter, man only has mind, man only thinks: they move by the application of external force; man is self-moved, is a creature of motives, has within him a principle of action: they are unconscious of their own existence, or of the existence of other parts of nature; but man contemplates, wonders at, admires all: they will, probably, disappear from their spheres, be blotted out from the places which they occupy, in immensity, and "leave not a wreck behind;" but man has within him an imperishable principle of life, a principle incapable of decay and death.

That is a striking apostrophe on man, which Shakespear has put into the mouth of Hamlet:—"How noble in reason! how infinite in faculties! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action, how like an angel! in apprehension, how like a God! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals!" There is exaggeration in this description; but there is also truth. The picture is on too large a scale, and is too highly coloured; but it is a likeness. Had Shakespeare, however, been an atheist, we should never have read these words,

never have contemplated this picture; he would have employed his great powers, to exhibit a description the reverse of the above, to diminish, degrade, annihilate us.

Atheism does not allow us to believe, that we possess an immaterial principle, a spiritual nature: it demolishes the distinction between mind and matter, and attributes to animal organization all the splendid phenomena of intellectual faculties and moral feelings. Discarding the sentiment of an Infinite Spirit, it admits of none that is finite; and, therefore, throughout the universe, there is nothing but matter; amongst the wisest of the human race, there has ever been nothing but delusion, on the subject of immaterial existence; and life and immortality are only splendid fictions! The consequence of this theory is obvious; we are bereft of the noblest object of contemplation, and the highest, and, in some respects, the only source of comfort; and our nature, which we have been wont to contemplate with something like reverence, sinks into meanness and disregard, not one degree superior to that of an ape, except as we are of a somewhat more slightly form, and of a stronger instinct.

4. There is something flattering in the thought, that as the whole system of human affairs did not originate in chance; so, neither does chance uphold and preserve it. No consideration can exalt us more, than that we are objects of the divine regard; that the Creator of the ends of the earth, the Lord of the universe, takes a deep interest in our well-being; that the "ever-waking eye" which looks through all space, and all time, and marks with unerring accuracy all events, ponders every footstep of our going, and every thought and feeling of our hearts; that the same wonder-working power which brought into being all worlds, and appointed and upholds the laws of universal nature, sustains our individual existence, and preserves us through so many years; that the same diffusive benevolence which embraces and

blesse other and higher parts of the Creation, has so richly provided us with all the means of life and happiness; that the same supreme Authority which receives the unreserved and unceasing homage of myriads of pure and perfect intelligences, claims our submission and devotedness. A value is thus set upon us, which adds an additional honour to those other honours, arising from our exalted origin and our wonderful constitution.

But, here also, atheism steps in, to take the crown from our heads. Preserver, Benefactor, Governor, of course, we have none! We behold a vast system of parts, all astonishingly related, each to each; all governed by laws which, in their operation, observe the utmost precision; all contributing, without failure, to certain results: deviation, failure here, would be absolute and immediate ruin to all life, both vegetable and animal. But, whence this relation of parts, these laws, this accuracy and constancy? Has no invisible hand been concerned in adjusting, upholding, directing the relations, laws, and so forth, of external visible nature? We find ourselves inhabitants of a world, where many circumstances, not necessarily existing, concur, to render it a place of residence, peculiarly adapted to beings of our make, a spacious mansion fitted up for our convenience and comfort, in which there are beauties for the eye, and harmonies for the ear, and fragrance for the smell, and viands for the palate, and supplies and satisfactions issuing from a thousand sources. But how we came here, or whence the wonderful adaptation, we have no means of guessing! No doubt, we must ascribe the whole to accident! Again: We possess, what is sometimes, not unaptly, called, an "inner man;" that is, a rational and moral constitution, in contradistinction from our animal nature. It will not be denied, that we are creatures of understanding, will, conscience, motives; that these are common to our species; and that we are, therefore, capable of moral rule. But the atheist denies



that there is a moral Rector of the world, and a Supreme Law to which we are held amenable ; and, consequently, we are irresponsible beings, and possess our capability in vain ! Here, then, is a deviation from the economy usually observed by nature, in all her provisions ; a refutation of Aristotle's famous maxim, " That nature does nothing in vain ! "

5. The insufficiency and uncertainty of worldly happiness are so well known, and so generally admitted, as hardly to need illustration or proof. To say, that no person who reposes in earthly possessions, or sensual gratifications, enjoys perfect bliss, is to utter a self-evident truth. It is not within the whole compass of created nature, to impart unmixed and permanent happiness to man. Nor is there an individual, who applies himself to ascertain the fact, by actual experiment, (whatever may be his facilities to indulge,) that will not, sooner or later, discover it, to his own mortification. But, as other creatures enjoy, so far as we know, unmixed satisfactions, according to their respective natures, and are destitute of distressing cares and fears, and ungratified desires, it is the part of wisdom in us, to inquire, if there be no means by which we may place ourselves on an equality, at least, with them.

We turn to religion, and we find in it a new element, as perfectly adapted to our intellectual and moral nature, as the objects of sense are to our animal nature. We prove, that there are no joys like the joys of faith ; they are spiritual, unalloyed, independent of the circumstances of time, and permanent as the exalted source whence they are derived. Religion imparts complete satisfaction, so far as it is realized and exemplified. Is a religious man friendless ? He solaces himself in the hope, that he has a friend in heaven. Is he oppressed ? He finds relief in the persuasion, that there is a righteous Avenger of all human wrongs. Is he the subject of disease and pain ? His very sufferings are mitigated,



by a firm belief in the wise and benevolent intention of the Divine Parent, who medicates every bitter cup which his children drink. Is he descending into the grave, under the pressure of years and infirmities? He has nothing to fear, but much to hope, from death:—the prospect of an undying life sustains and cheers his moments of dissolution.

Now, of all this, the atheist would deprive us; and of all this, he deprives himself. He may experience pleasure here, in the pursuits of literature, in the study of the arts and sciences, in the intercourse of friendship; and in these respects, the believer is equal with him; but, other pleasures he has none, except those which are animal. And, whatever he may pretend, as to sobriety, chastity, temperance, and so forth; he holds self-denial to be an evil, and adopts, as the rule of his general conduct, the well-known licentious maxim:—"Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." And, he certainly has no friend in heaven; no Avenger of unredressed wrongs; no assurance, that the ills of life shall have a beneficial issue; no expectation of an immortal, blissful existence: he loses every thing in death, and gains nothing, but the humiliation and annihilation of the grave.

6. The sight of any exquisitely constructed piece of machinery, whose use does not, at once, appear, would speedily suggest to the mind of the beholder the question, For what end was it fabricated? And, in proportion to the care and labour expended upon it, would be the presumed importance of the purpose, to which it was intended to be applied. We ourselves are this piece of machinery. And, when we contemplate, not only our organical bodies, but our intellectual and moral constitution,—our understanding, memory, affections, will, conscience,—our vast capacities and boundless desires, we naturally enquire, What is the principal design of our being?—for what are we ultimately des-

timed? Our capacities are manifestly above the ordinary purposes of life; and the gratifications of sense are not the elevated and refined satisfactions, of which we seem capable, and for which we sigh. It would seem reasonable, therefore, to infer, that there are nobler exercises appropriate to us, than those required to make provision for our bodies; and, that there are higher delights, than the delights of sense.

Accordingly, religion teaches us, that our first and chief duties relate to our Creator; and that the highest happiness, of which we are susceptible, is derived from his service, and from the hope of his approbation. But here, too, atheism puts a negative alike upon our premises and our conclusions: it proscribes all such duties, and affirms, that all happiness drawn from such a source is absolute delusion. Our faculties and capacities, forsooth, are only the fuller development and maturity of inferior animals—of an oyster or a tadpole, for example,—our only sphere is earth,—our only end, to be brief, is—

“To draw nutrition, propagate, and rot!”

7. When we deposit in the earth, the remains of a beloved relative; or feel, that we ourselves are sinking into the grave, the heart-rending grief, in the one case; or, the gloom and depression, in the other, is greatly relieved by the belief of a separate existence, and the hope of a renewed life, even for the body. That the whole of us does not die; that there is an immortal spark enshrined in our mortal bodies, and that our mortal parts themselves shall become immortal; that “this corruptible shall put on incorruption,” has been the persuasion and solace of the most profound and splendid minds—the most extraordinary geniuses, that ever appeared in this world. It may be said, that we have not mathematical proof of these pleasing hypotheses. Neither have we, of their falsehood. And, independent of Divine testimony, (which, however, to a believer, is

demonstration,) the balance of probability is greatly in their favour: And it is impossible not to perceive the superior importance which they attach to us—the honor which they confer upon our compound nature.

But, here again, atheism traverses our path, to destroy our consideration, and to extinguish our hopes. Instead of claiming an almost equality with the supposed bright intelligences of heaven, we can rank only with the animal creation!—what we fancied the dawn of our existence, is its entire day!—and, instead of inheriting an endless life, we are to be, altogether, speedily and finally extinguished, devoured by corruption, turned into absolute nothingness! No internal, conscious principle survives the wreck of our bodies!—No day is to dawn upon the darkness of the grave!—No voice is ever to command the dead back into life! Thus, immediate annihilation stares us in the face; and, like the leaves in autumn, the successive generations of the proud race of man return, to enrich the soil from which they sprang!—to be lost from the universe of conscious and percipient beings!

8. Reader! these are a few of the honors and consolations of atheism! And it is for these, that we are to exchange all that religion bestows, and promises to bestow, upon its votaries! And because we prefer our faith to the atheists' disbelief, and our assured and animating hopes to their uncertain and gloomy reveries, we are thought worthy of sneers and sarcasms, and pronounced credulous blockheads; a set of dreamers; cousins german, at least, to the inmates of a particular class of asylums!

Atheists exhaust their vocabulary and rack their inventions, to cry down the popular belief, and to represent all who entertain it, as so many knaves or fools. But, we may congratulate ourselves, that we form a vast fellowship; that we peril no important interests, by a steadfast adherence to our faith; that we gain much,

and are on the safe side, even should the issue prove us to have been dupes of an entire delusion. All generations bear testimony with us ; all the appearances of Nature bear testimony with us ; the seasons, as they revolve, bear testimony with us ; the natural and unsophisticated feelings of every human bosom bear testimony with us, to the existence and the upholding and governing power of a Divine Creator.



## CHAPTER IX.

ATHEISM EXPOSES ITS DISCIPLES TO CERTAIN AND  
IMMINENT DANGER.

1. In the ordinary affairs of life, most persons are quick at discerning what would prove an advantage, or a disadvantage, to their interests. Are they importuned to embark in a commercial speculation? They calculate, with great care and precision, on the probable loss or gain—on the chances for or against them—ere they take their resolution, and yield their consent. Are they solicited, to attempt a journey through an unfrequented and dangerous pass? Before they set forward, they adopt every conceivable precaution, make provision to defend themselves, not only from what may occur, but from what can occur; and, thus, guard against every possible contingency. Is it proposed to them, to form an important and a permanent connexion? The first thought of their minds is the advantage, or the disadvantage, to accrue:—they revolve consequences, balance interests, and accept or reject the proposition, as it might seem to promise good or evil. The probability of ruin to their property, reputation, or peace, would be a sufficient reason for repelling, at once, every effort to induce compliance. These varied illustrations exhibit, more fully, our precautions character; and *shew, more distinctly, one of the important instincts*

with which Providence has armed us, for our security and preservation.

2. Now, it is the transference of this conduct—the application of this instinct—to our immortal interests, which constitutes religion, in the highest and best sense of the term. And, it is here, that so many egregiously fail. But, even *they* are disposed to make concessions, in favor of religion; to offer some excuses for their irreligious conduct. They do not theoretically repudiate religion, but practically:—they admit its reality and importance; but, it does not suit their convenience, to walk by its rules:—they would not be thought wholly destitute of religious purpose—utterly reckless, as to religious hopes; but, it is not their pleasure, at the present time, to act out their convictions of duty. They love darkness rather than light; and, are lamentable examples of criminal inconsistency: but, they are not disbelievers; they do not avowedly abandon respect for religion, in the abstract; they do not dare—cannot hold in defiance—a Supreme Power, nor scoff at the doctrine of an everlasting state of existence.

3. Atheists, however, take a directly opposite course. And their consummate folly appears in this: they do not guard against possible or probable danger,—they do not make provision for the worst. In other things, they would be disciples of Bacon, rather than of Aristotle; they would wish to reason from facts, rather than from hypotheses; they would criticise, with prodigious rigidity, all evidence, on which they might be required to found an important theory, where mistake would be followed by serious consequences to their interests. Now, we would calmly ask, What are the facts which form the basis of atheistical disbelief? By what evidence is it, or can it be proved that there is no God, which, in other grave affairs, would satisfy a reasonable man? Whence are the facts and the proofs *derived*? If the tremendous conclusion, that there is

no Supreme First Cause has been attained, by what process of inquiry and demonstration has it been reached? If an assurance to this effect is felt, on what does it rest? No atheist—sapiient as he may fancy himself—can pretend to omniscience,—to infallibility. His eye does not range infinite space, and distinguish all possible kinds and modes of existence. His assumptions are not necessarily, absolute certainties; he can set up no such claim. He *may*, then, be mistaken. There *may* be a God. And with what confidence, or with what hope, can he contemplate this possible, this probable, this fearful alternative!

4. This argument has been pressed, with singular ability, in the following quotation:—"The wonder, then, turns on the great process, by which a man could grow to the immense intelligence that can know that there is no God. What ages and what lights are requisite for *this* attainment! This intelligence involves the very attributes of Divinity, while a God is denied. For unless this man is omnipresent, unless he is at this moment in every place in the universe, he cannot know but there may be in some place manifestations of a Deity, by which even *he* would be overpowered. If he does not know absolutely every agent in the universe, the one that he does not know may be a God. If he is not himself the chief agent in the universe, and does not know what is so, that which is so may be a God. If he is not in absolute possession of all the propositions that constitute universal truth, the one which he wants may be, that there is a God. If he cannot with certainty assign the cause of all that he perceives to exist, that cause may be a God. If he does not know every thing that has been done in the immeasurable ages that are past, some things may have been done by a God. Thus, unless he knows all things; that is, precludes another Deity by being one himself, he *cannot know that the Being whose existence he rejects,*



does not exist. But he must *know* that he does not exist, else he deserves equal contempt and compassion for the temerity with which he firmly avows his rejection and acts accordingly." 1

5. The stoutest sceptic cannot honestly undertake to disprove the Divine existence. He may tell us, that we have not made out a case against his opinions sufficiently strong, to put him out of love with them; or, that we have not proved, to his satisfaction, the superiority of our own, so as to induce him to embrace them: but he cannot, by any induction of which we have a knowledge, place his sentiments above suspicion, or demonstrate that ours are below credit. On the contrary, he must admit, at least, the *possibility* of a God; the *possibility*, that a denial of his existence involves a high degree of criminality; and the *possibility*, that his conduct may become a subject of judicial inquiry, in a court, where it will meet with condemnation and punishment. We repeat, taking the lowest ground, there is an *undeniable possibility* of all this. And is there no hazard in being an atheist? Is there nothing, in so many plain *possibilities* of ruin to a person of this description, to produce occasional misgivings; especially in those calm, contemplative moments, when the minds of most men melt under their own reflections? In the total absence of *all knowledge*, that the great objects embraced in a religious belief are so many nullities, what heroism—what desperation—is necessary, to treat them as such,—and to move on towards the issue of life, without apprehensive emotion, and reckless of the responsibilities which *may ensue*? Surely, none but a person under some disastrous influence—some malignant enchantment—bereft of the feelings common to humanity, can act thus!

6. "Though the arguments on both sides were equal"

1 Foster's Essays, Letter V.



—says a celebrated author, speaking of theism and atheism—"yet the hazard is infinitely unequal. If it be proved, that there is no God, the religious man may be as happy in this world as the atheist; nay, the principles of religion and virtue do in their own natures tend to make him happier, because they give satisfaction to his mind, and his conscience by this means is freed from many fearful girds and twinges which the atheist feels. Besides that, the practice of religion and virtue doth naturally promote our temporal felicity. It is more for a man's health, and more for his reputation, and more for his advantage, in all other worldly respects, to lead a virtuous than a vicious course of life. And, for the other world, if there be no God, the case of the religious man and the atheist will be alike, because they will both be extinguished by death, and be insensible of any farther happiness or misery."

"But, then, if the contrary opinion should prove true, that there is a God; and that the souls of men are transmitted out of this world into the other, there to receive the just reward of their actions; then, it is plain to every man at first sight, that the case of the religious man and the atheist must be vastly different;—then, 'where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?' And what, think we, shall be the portion of those who have affronted God, and derided his word, and made a mock of every thing that is sacred and religious? What can they expect, but to be rejected by him whom they have renounced, and to feel the terrible effects of that power and justice which they have despised? so that though the argument on both sides were equal, yet the danger is not so. On the one side, there is none at all; but it is infinite on the other. And, consequently, it must be monstrous folly for any man to make a mock of those things which he knows not, whether they be or not: and if they be, of all things in the world, they are *not jesting matters*."

7. And, again, the danger to which an atheist exposes himself, is participated by all, whom he may induce to adopt his notions. Like some ascending planet, the greater our elevation, the more extensive and powerful is our influence. By elevation, however, in this connection, is not intended a commanding position in society, official rank, a splendid title, great wealth, or profound learning; but, authority, or power, over others; ability, from whatever cause, to influence them for good or evil. And, there is no situation, relation, or condition of life, which has not attached to it more or less of this ability. The influence in society, generally, works downwards: but, even persons of the same grade act upon each other, to a surprising extent. And morally considered, no man perishes alone. Evil engenders evil more readily and abundantly than good begets good, however contracted the sphere, or humble the circumstances, in which it operates. A man of bad religious sentiments, is like a person under a contagious disease—his very atmosphere has death in it: his opinions corrupt and destroy, by contact, those who have the misfortune to be thrown in his way. If a prince, his subjects are likely to imbibe the moral poison of his notions; if a master, his servants will, most probably, partake of his corruption; if a parent, in nine cases out of ten, children receive their parents' sentiments, with as little inquiry, and as much satisfaction, as they inherit their property; if a friend, companionship with him will hardly fail to be fatal. And, therefore, "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful."

8. Even should religious sentiments be false and delusive, we may defy the ingenuity of man, to find out, in what way they can prove injurious, either to the *individual* who entertains them; or, through him, to *his fellows*. It can be an injury to no one, ever to

retain in his bosom a thrilling consciousness of a Divine presence and inspection; and, of his own accountableness, so as to place his animal passions, otherwise rampant—under powerful and permanent restraint; to be influenced by urgent motives to justice, truth, and goodness, drawn from unearthly considerations, and independent of time and circumstances:—to be honest, temperate, chaste, charitable; and to be so conscientiously and habitually. And should a religious man succeed in forming others to his own mould, in making them—in all these respects—imitations of himself, he must be counted with their best benefactors. And hence we never read or hear of a religious man who “mourned at the last,” that he had been religious; or, that he had proselyted some to his religious opinions and practices.

Now, can all this be predicated of atheism and of atheists? Let a man fancy the eye of no Divinity upon him; let him possess no motives to virtue, but those derived from low and earthly considerations; let the intimations of conscience be rebuked, as the impertinent intermeddlings of a mere arbitrary principle; and, let every part of human conduct be viewed as having a relation only to our present transient existence; and all its consequences, whether in relation to ourselves, or to others, as of certain termination with this life; and, he will have some difficulty, to persuade shrewd and cautious persons, that they may safely confide in him, when it would be for his supposed interest, to disappoint their hopes. And should he convert his family, or his friends, to his own views and actings, it requires no extraordinary prescience to foretell, that from the hour of such conversion, they will be “earthly, sensual, and devilish;” and, that by reason of it, he will have inflicted an evil, which, unless given up to judicial induration, may occasion him, in the closing moments of his *pernicious life*, the bitterest sorrows.



9. In the plenitude of health, and with a seemingly remote prospect of the great catastrophe of life, the courage of disbelievers may be tolerably firm; and even as the last hour draws on, they may seem but little moved: and, for the same reason that a school-boy whistles, in passing through a grave-yard, may maintain an appearance of their usual jocularly. But, they *must* be subject to occasional misgivings, in their earliest and best days; and these misgivings are not likely to be fewer, or more faint, as the shadows of the evening of life gather around them, and their sun is about to set. And, accordingly, on whatever principle it may be attempted to account for the fact, it does so happen, that a very considerable change takes place in the minds of many of them, when it appears pretty certain, that their *extrema dies*—their last day—has arrived. Few attain to such a pitch of hardihood, as to be able to repress every rising fear, when it is indubitable, that pulsation is about to cease: few are known to recommend their sentiments in death, as their best and most valued legacy to their surviving relatives and friends: few are heard to exult, on the margin of life, in prospect of the awful gulf of annihilation into which they are soon to sink: few die as that arch-infidel, Hume, died. And we appeal to every man of sense and decency, whether idle jests are not quite out of place, and do not indicate a criminal degree of vanity and levity, where the solemn event of dissolution is at hand, even viewing it as only the loss of being.

The most affecting statements that ever met our eyes are those, which exhibit the death-bed scenes of persons, who lived denying the Author of their existence, and rejecting the provision which he has made for human salvation. And the stinging remorse, self-reproaches, bitter wailings, and appalling forebodings of these persons, arose not less, in some cases, from the evil which they had occasioned to others, than from the evil



which, they had brought upon themselves. And, indeed, we can hardly conceive a cause of deeper and more heart-rending misery, than for a man—aroused, at length, to the folly and criminality of his conduct—to reflect, in the last hour of his earthly existence, that, although he die, the ruinous effects of his opinions and practices upon his family, or his friends, will never die, but pass with them into another state of being, and sink them lower than the grave!

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## CHAPTER X.

THEISM GIVES NO RATIONAL ACCOUNT OF THE ORIGIN  
OF ALL THINGS.

1. COULD we conceive the case of a man who had come into existence, in maturity; and, without the ordinary stages of progressive advancement from infancy to youth, and from youth to manhood—found himself in the possession of strong intellectual faculties, brought, at once, into exercise on the visible creation; and, consequently, admitting him to an extensive and profound acquaintance with its various phenomena; it would prove exceedingly interesting to learn his sentiments, as to the points at issue between theists and atheists.

This person might be held, for a time, in mute astonishment, or in silent admiration, at the objects of his contemplation;—he might be driven to endless expedients to solve the problem of the universe;—many of his guesses might be exceedingly ludicrous, and much confusion and uncertainty might run through his ideas: but, he would hardly settle down in absolute atheism; he would hardly infer eternity for so much contrivance; accident for so much beautiful and unvarying order; self-production for forms of existence so numerous and various; and the absence of benevolent purpose from the astonishing provision for all creatures, according to their respective natures and capacities. It would be *difficult*, indeed, to say how far he would succeed, in

decyphering the characters of Divinity impressed on the entire creation, and discerning the Supreme First Cause in the sensible manifestations of his glory everywhere beheld; but, it is almost certain, he would conclude, that an Intelligent Power resided somewhere; and although invisible, operated universally. This immense conclusion once attained, other conclusions would be easy, explanations would successively arise, and thousands of difficulties would vanish.

2. When an avowed atheist is requested to reconcile what he professes to believe, or rather, to disbelieve, with what he beholds, in what endless mazes of conjecture is he lost! to what subterfuges is he driven!—what contradictions are necessary in the attempt, to sustain his contradictory theory, and to impart a semblance of probability to notions, which are as unphilosophical as they are impious! Changes are immediately and incessantly rung on the phrases “eternity of matter”—“casual existence”—“endless series”—“a principle of Nature”—and so forth; phrases which assume every thing and prove nothing; and which pass current, only while employed as vague generalities. We have sometimes been astonished at the apparent self-satisfaction, not to mention the impudent dogmatism, with which certain pseudo-philosophers reiterate these terms; as if assumptions were facts, and vain words convincing arguments. Some latitude, perhaps, must be conceded to persons, who hold opinions contrary to all the world besides, for the truth of which they cannot adduce the shadow of real a proof; and who undertake, as to several points, to prove a pure negative.

The opinion which makes matter eternal is only an old fancy revived. Our modern atheists, who hold this opinion, may accredit themselves as the authors of an original conception; but their originality is plagiarism, and they are pretenders. It is, however, of no importance with whom arose the notion, or by whom it has

been promulgated, for it is utterly untenable. It may be difficult, or impossible, to disprove the eternity of matter, as an abstract question, by any process of reasoning, or induction of facts; it is a subject with which our feeble faculties would attempt in vain to grapple. But, where is found a semblance of proof, that matter has been eternal? The notion is absolutely destitute of proof; it is a mere guess. But, whatever may be conjectured, or predicated, of masses of unorganized and inert matter, in this respect, cannot apply to matter as beheld in myriads of instances throughout the creation, without the previous assumption, which involves, according to all analogy, an impossibility, that contrivance can exist without a contriver; order, without arrangement; adaptation, without adapting power; an effect, without a cause;—nay, that an effect exceeds its pretended cause, to an inconceivable extent.

That something must have been eternal is evident, or nothing could ever have been. This, the theist and the atheist alike believe. But, then, what was this something? This is the point in dispute. Was it an Almighty Intelligence, or was it insensate matter? The religious man maintains the former, and accounts for all the known phenomena of Nature; the irreligious man the latter, and explains nothing. Which, for example, is more probable?—which approves itself most to our common sense?—that an eternal mind produced matter, or that eternal matter produced mind? An atheist asks, How could an eternal *mind* produce or modify *matter*? We have always felt the impotency and futility of this objection. First, it supposes a limitation to omnipotence: and secondly, it insinuates that mind can have no power over matter—that matter only can act upon matter—which is contrary to experience. Ignorance and presumption are the stumbling-block *here*. What infinite existence is, we are utterly incompetent to conceive. Infinity, applied to any thing—



infinity of space, or infinity of knowledge or power—overwhelms us, in a moment. We can form no guess what is spirit;—there is nothing to which we can resemble it. And, of course, we cannot guess, what is an infinite Spirit. And who shall venture to circumscribe the resources of such an agent? What power, both to create and to destroy, *may* he not possess?

“Hobbes has asserted,” says an able writer, “and others have, with an air of triumph, repeated the assertion, that an incorporeal substance is a contradiction and an absurdity. If ever a mere *gratis dictum* was obtruded as argument, it is here. We call upon the materialist to prove the contradiction. We would challenge him to shew, that it is impossible for any substance to exist, but body or material substance,—nothing but what may be seen or touched. If he confine the term substance to body, he not only palpably begs the question, but proves himself ignorant of the real meaning of the word. A substance is that in which qualities or properties inhere, whatever these qualities or properties may be. And whenever the materialist has proved, that there can be no substance but matter; no quality, no property, no accident, in the whole universe, but what belongs to body; then, and not till then, can his assertion be received as an established fact.”

That eternal, insensate matter produced mind is, indeed, beyond all belief! “It is as impossible,” says Locke, “to conceive, that ever bare incogitative matter should produce a thinking, intelligent being, as that nothing should of itself produce matter. Let us suppose any parcel of matter eternal, great or small, we shall find it, in itself, able to produce nothing. For example: let us suppose the next pebble we meet with, eternal, closely united, and the parts firmly at rest together; if there were no other being in the world, must it not eternally remain so, a dead inactive lump? Is it pos-

sible to conceive it can add motion to itself, being purely matter, or produce any thing? Matter, then, by its own strength, cannot produce in itself so much as motion; the motion it has must also be from eternity, or else be produced, and added to matter by some other being more powerful than matter; matter, as is evident, having not power to produce motion in itself. But, let us suppose motion eternal too; yet matter, incogitative matter and motion, whatever changes it might produce of figure and bulk, could never produce thought: knowledge will still be as far beyond the power of motion and matter to produce, as matter is beyond the power of nothing, or non-entity, to produce. And I appeal to every one's own thoughts, whether he cannot as easily conceive matter produced by nothing, as thought to be produced by pure matter, when before there was no such thing as thought or an intelligent being existing?"

Organization, life, instinct, rationality—all of which are united in man—can no more have originated with mere matter, than mere matter could have originated itself. There is no fact, no example, no analogy—no, nor the shadow of one of them—to suggest or support the notion. Organization is a degree of excellence superior, and superadded, to mere matter. The same may be said of life, in reference to organization; of instinct, in relation to life; and of rationality, in respect to instinct. And to tell us, that a being endowed with all these several degrees of excellence, each surpassing the other, and the whole forming a splendid climax of excellences, sprang from the bosom of matter, by means of some occult energy, some latent property of its own—and necessary to it—is to offer a gross insult to our understandings; to contradict the evidence of our senses:—it is even more nonsensical, than the old heathen fable of Prometheus, who is said, to have *manufactured* the first human pair out of clay; and then, to have *stolen* fire from heaven to animate them.

4. The notion of casual existence is, likewise, without foundation. This notion is of Epicurean origin; and may be regarded as another of those ingenious expedients, which men often employ, to extricate themselves from the labyrinths of their own thoughts, when attempting to account for things beyond their reach. The word casual is synonymous with accidental; and the casual existence of the universe, or of any part of it, must mean, therefore, an existence, not the result of a designing Intelligence and an Almighty Power, but of chance. So, then, all that exists, that we behold around us, or are in ourselves, is the result of some happy casualty, accident, or chance! The fancy is preposterous,—the thing is impossible! What convulsion of matter—even supposing matter to have been eternal—could have produced, for example, the solar system? What agitation of the elements could have given existence to the meanest animal, with its appropriate organization, orderly proportions, and powerful instincts? What appetency of atoms could have originated the human body, so fearfully and wonderfully made,—mechanism so complex and exquisite? Miserable sophistry! And yet, this is not a thousandth part of the false reasoning of atheism!

It would be to as little purpose, to attempt to reason with one of those ill-fated mortals in whom the light of reason is extinguished, as with a man who has taken it into his head, to deny that *design*—the adaptation of means to ends—to a surpassing extent, runs through all nature. Everywhere it is beheld, to excite our admiration, and to command our homage. The philosopher does not require to be told this; and every man may become a philosopher, and discover the fact for himself, if he please. Now, whence came this universal contrivance,—this provision of means to ends? Has it no higher origin than chance? “Will chance fit means to ends, and that in ten thousand instances, and not fail



in any one? How often might a man, after he had jumbled a set of letters in a bag, fling them out upon the ground, before they would fall into an exact poem, yea, or so much as make a good discourse in prose? And may not a little book be as easily made by chance, as this great volume of the world? How long might a man be in sprinkling colours upon canvas with a careless hand, before they would happen to make the exact picture of a man? And is a man easier made by chance than his picture? How long might twenty thousand blind men, who should be sent out from the several remote parts of England, wander up and down, before they would all meet on Salisbury Plain, and fall into rank and file in the exact order of an army? And yet, this is much more easy to be imagined, than how the innumerable blind parts of matter should rendezvous themselves into a world. A man that sees Henry the Seventh's chapel, at Westminster, might with as good reason maintain (yea, with much better, considering the vast difference betwixt that little structure and the huge fabric of the world) that it was never contrived or built by any man, but that the stones did by chance grow into those curious figures into which they seem to have been cut and graven; and that *upon a time* (as tales usually begin) the materials of that building, the stone, mortar, timber, iron, lead and glass, happily met together, and very fortunately ranged themselves into that delicate order in which we see them now so close compacted, that it must be a very great chance that parts them again. What would the world think of a man that should advance such an opinion as this, and write a book for it? If they would do him right, they ought to look upon him as mad: but yet, with a little more reason than any man can have to say that the world was made by chance, or that the first men grew up out of the earth as plants do now. For can any thing be more ridiculous, and against all reason, than to ascribe the



production of men to the first fruitfulness of the earth, without so much as one instance and experiment in any age or history, to countenance so monstrous a supposition? The thing is, at first sight, so gross and palpable, that no discourse about it can make it more apparent. And yet, these shameful *beggars of principles*, who give this precarious account of the original of all things, assume to themselves to be the men of reason, the *great wits* of the world, the only cautious and wary persons, that hate to be imposed upon; that must have convincing evidence for every thing, and can admit of nothing without a clear demonstration of it!"<sup>1</sup>

5. An "endless series" of any of the works of God, means an unbroken succession of individuals,—an unbroken succession which had no beginning! Not to mention the contradiction necessarily involved in these words, the idea surpasses us; and it is employed with a view to get rid of the doctrine of the creation, and, consequently, of a creating power. Remote causes lie beyond the sphere of our observation. A few only of the links of the mysterious concatenation which connects one thing with another and all with God, fall under our notice. But, if every effect must have an adequate cause, what becomes of the endless-series-scheme, in accounting for organized existence—in accounting for ourselves? However far back we proceed, with a fancied endless series of human beings, this difficulty still presses upon us with insuperable and undiminished force:—here is exquisitely organized being, without intelligent agency; surpassing design, without a designer; in short, a stupendous effect, without the shadow of a cause! Common sense recoils from contradiction and absurdity so palpable! Whence, then, the human race? Did matter assume this modification from some inherent property of its own; or from the

<sup>1</sup> Tillotson's Sermons, Sermon 1.

exercise of a foreign power? In other words—Are we self-created, or the production of an almighty Power?

But it may be objected here, as, indeed, it has often been, that man may as well have been eternal as God. We do not pretend to be able to explain every difficulty that can be suggested; or to answer every question that can be proposed, with regard to a Final Cause. Our minds are not adequate to the comprehension of eternal being,—of self-existence. Numbers and distance confound us. We cannot go far back, in recounting cycles of ages; we are soon bewildered, when we would estimate the vastness of the material universe: we cannot “comprehend the non-existence of a beginning.” Nor are we less confounded in the attempt to conceive of self-existence—of an uncaused cause—of something which is not an effect of some other thing. We are, however, competent to this effort:—we can trace an analogy between the works of art and the works of nature:—we can infer, that if every house or every steam-engine must have had a builder—a builder, too, of intelligence to contrive and of power to execute—so the creation, (or that part of it, the human being, a specimen of wonderful mechanism) must have had a wise and powerful Author. We can demonstrate the existence of a God, in the self-same way, and with equal satisfaction, as we prove the existence of a contriver from his contrivance—an agent, from his agency,—a watchmaker, from a watch. We can proceed no farther; we need go no farther; we wish to go no farther.

6. A “principle of Nature” is a phrase, to the use of which we do not object, except for a perverted and an impious purpose. We are, however, liable to be misled by terms. What is Nature? and what is a principle of Nature? Nature, so far as the discoveries of science aid our conceptions, is nothing else than an *incalculable* number of globes, similar to our own globe, and governed by the same laws, subject to the same

vicissitudes, inhabited, it is probable, by a kindred order of beings. Now, does this view of Nature authorize us to conclude, that it is a vast Genetrix of whatever exists?—that these huge masses of unconscious matter possess, in themselves, a creative power, adequate to the production of every thing that has being?—that there is latent in them some undefined and prolific energy, which generates all kinds and grades of existence? It may be a sufficient answer to this hypothesis, that it rests solely upon the authority of those who entertain it, that it is perfectly gratuitous, and that it is against the evidence of our senses. We know of no principle in our own globe, for example, which produces, or which could have produced, man and beast. If such a principle ever existed, how has it disappeared? Or if it now exist, where can we discern its working,—where can we trace any indication of its operation.

To tell us that the universe itself is God, only multiplies our difficulties, and confounds our senses, as well as our thoughts. On this hypothesis, earth, water, air, fire, yea, we ourselves—for we are a part of the whole—are God? For no other purpose is such nonsense fabricated, but to cast dust into the eyes of persons, who have no objection to be blinded. And even should the objector vary his objection, and talk of some principle, or active power of the universe, as the final cause of every form and grade of existence; what is that, but to make an *effect*, the *final cause* of all *effects*?—to make a *Divinity* of this assumed principle, or active power, and to invest it with the attributes which we claim for God?

## CHAPTER XI.

ATHEISM CONTRADICTED AND REFUTED BY THE FACTS OF  
THE CREATION.

1. It is sometimes ignorantly and impiously said, "If there be a God, why does he not show himself; and, thus, at once, banish doubt and silence objection?" In what way would the persons, so saying, wish the manifestation to be made? The appearance must be miraculous; it would be overwhelming; and it could only be symbolical. Before the Deity could appear personally to us, a complete metamorphosis of himself, or of us, must take place; he must cease to be spiritual, or we to be corporeal. But, why should the Deity work a miracle, to satisfy unreasonable demands; to convince persons, who ought to be convinced without one? And might not every succeeding generation, or every individual of every succeeding generation, of the human family, require to be convinced by the same means? Where, then, would be the end of miracles? Besides; all nature is a symbol of the Deity—a vast body representing the infinite Spirit, who animates, sustains, and controls it. And it seems a rule of the Divine procedure, never to create extraordinary means, to effect that to which existing and ordinary means are fully adequate. God does show himself to us. We are not more surrounded by his works, than by himself. And we discern him in every revolving star, in every



ray of light, in every breath of air, in every drop of rain, in every blade of grass, in every insect, and in every atom. Not to discern him, proves us wilfully blind; not to confess that we see him, incorrigibly perverse. The belief, indeed, of a great Creator and moral Governor of the world, is likely to prove troublesome enough to an individual, who believes also that he is not what such a Being can approve: but, to fly to atheism, to rid himself of this annoyance, is to act the part of a man, who, to escape a less evil, precipitates himself into a greater.

2. If "no man hath seen God at any time," is there, therefore, no God? The inference cannot be sustained. As well may a person who has no visual organ, or who will not employ the one he possesses, infer that there is no such thing as light, although, at that very moment, the sun shines through his window, and enlightens and warms his apartment. All creation, from the vast to the minute, and from the most complex to the most simple, attests its Author. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy-work." The Deity has so indelibly imprinted his own perfections upon his works, that, like the effigy of the famous Athenian artist, wrought into the statue of Minerva, the former cannot be obliterated, but by the destruction of the latter.

We see intelligence, as far exceeding all the intelligence of creatures, of whom we have a knowledge—even were it concentrated in one stupendous intellect—as the light and glory of a summer's sun exceed a single ray: we behold magnificence, to produce and uphold which, as much surpasses all the power with which we are acquainted, as an infinite series surpasses a unit: we perceive goodness everywhere diffused, embracing alike intellectual and animal nature, displayed in every contrivance and in every provision, making "a happy world after all;" justifying the declaration, "His tender

mercies are over all his works." We contemplate unvarying order and undecaying vigor, for which we can conceive no assignable origin, unless we admit the existence of a Deity: we perceive effects issuing from causes—and these causes, again, the effects of other causes, in endless concatenation—until we pass the limit of human observation, and lose ourselves amidst the unknown grandeur of Infinite Majesty: we behold parts added to parts, constituting a vast, compact, and beautiful whole, between all of which, we plainly trace relation and subserviency. The man, therefore, who ventures to pronounce the wonderful works of the creation—of which himself is not the least wonderful—authorless, deserves to be esteemed a maniac, by the concurrent suffrage of his species, and to be dealt with accordingly.

3. It will not be expected, that a single chapter of a small volume, should exhibit an elaborate exposition of the argument *a posteriori*—that is, from effect to cause—for the existence of God. Nor is it necessary, that a person of quick and penetrating perception should be conducted into every department of nature; that all its deep and mysterious recesses should be laid open before him; that he should become conversant with every cognizable fact—with all its minute circumstances—which evinces the exercise of divine perfections, to produce within him a conviction that there is an Almighty Creator—a tolerable acquaintance with any one department; a general view of the phenomena every where beheld; the knowledge of a few plain, palpable facts will leave no doubt on his mind, that there must be a great invisible Being, who created and sustains the universe. An eminent philosopher once declared, that a single straw furnished ample proof of the existence of a God.

4. It has been observed, that the principal evidence from nature, for a Deity, is the marks of design which it

exhibits. And it must be admitted, that this is conclusive. If a man could not believe, that his watch, or his weather-glass, is without a maker, because of the contrivance which it displays—that is, the adjustment, in an orderly relation, of one part to another, and of all the parts to the end proposed in its construction—in the name of common sense, how can he believe, that the entire frame of Nature, which displays an infinity of design, has no Maker? The inquisitive reader, who wishes to pursue this subject, may consult the able treatises, on the wisdom of God in the creation, of which there are many; and if I mistake not, ere he has proceeded far, he will feel with Lord Bacon, that he could sooner believe all the fables in the Legend, the Talmud, and the Alcoran, than that the universe has no intelligent Author. Or, should books be inaccessible to him, he may employ his own powers of observation and reflection; and, with very little labor, he will discover, what many a plain man has discovered, to his heart's satisfaction, that Nature is, throughout, "a vast magazine of contrivances."

5. We should be greatly delighted, did the limits which we have prescribed to ourselves admit of it, to conduct the reader into some of the wide fields of observation with which Nature abounds; and to draw his attention to the "manifold wisdom of God" therein displayed. We do not pretend to have traversed all the paths which scientific men have explored; nor to have looked very minutely into those parts of the Creator's ways, which come within the sphere of human observation: but we have beheld enough to carry the completest conviction to our own minds, that there is a God; that all Nature is replete with proofs of his being and presence, and that the man who is not *convinced* by its *ordinary appearances*, would remain, in fact, an atheist still, whatever extraordinary tokens might be afforded. *The same proofs will not necessarily produce, in every*



mind, equal conviction ; but the signs of an Almighty Intelligence are so palpably impressed upon his works—are so visible and intelligible to all who are disposed to interpret them—that to be disbelieving here, is to be criminal in the highest degree.

6. The atheist may sneeringly ask, “ Where is the design of which you boast ? ” We reply, Where is it not ? We defy human power to disprove the existence of an infinity of design ; design, everywhere and in every object ; design, visible in all the relations and subserviencies of Nature ; design, commensurate with the entire creation. To deny this, is to deny, in effect, that the sun was placed in our system, to be a centre of attraction and a source of light and heat, to all the planets which revolve around him ; that the elements are purposely provided, to sustain animal and vegetable life ; that the double motion of our globe is a provision, to secure to us the grateful variety of summer and winter, day and night : that, in the human body, especially, there is a relation of one part to another, and an adaptation of all the parts to the well-being of the individual ; that animal instincts were not intended to serve the ends for which they are employed. What can be thought of the intelligence, or of the uprightness, of the person, who dares to utter such a denial !—or, who requires from us *proof* of design, in all these respects ? We beg the reader’s candid attention to the following induction of particulars, illustrative of design in the above examples.

7. If it be inferred, that the sun must, from the law of gravity, occupy his present situation in our system, it cannot be inferred, that he *must* be to the whole system a centre of emanation, a source of light and heat. This luminary, for aught we know, might have been an opaque body ; and, in that case, all the dependent *planets* would have been revolving masses of dark, cold *clods*, incapable of sustaining animal or vegetable life.



Had he been half his present magnitude, and with the same distance, we should have been frozen; or as large again, we should have been scorched. Had one of the remotest planets been the ignited and luminous body in the system, it would have been useless, in relation to all the others. Had the sun been placed at the distance from us of one of the fixed stars, his radiations would hardly have been felt or known on earth. Or, had he been placed as near to us, as our own satellite, the moon, the whole atmosphere would have resembled an intensely heated furnace, the waters would have been like a boiling caldron, every mountain, as some one has said, a Vesuvius, and every plain a mass of ashes,—a desert of Arabia. Thus, we perceive, that the nature, magnitude, and situation of the sun are exactly suited to us; that a different arrangement would have been our destruction; and, that, therefore, there is a wise and benevolent design in the present.

8. The Elements are necessary, for the most part, to each other; and they are indispensable to the present inhabitants and productions of the world. Suppose the *total loss* of any one of the *Four*. Suppose, for example, the loss of Air. In that case, we should be unable to breathe; we could kindle no fire, convey no sound, receive no light, experience no rain or dew; our faculties of speech, hearing, seeing, and smelling would be useless; birds could not fly, nor ships sail, nor plants grow, nor animals of any species live. Were it less subtle and transparent, it would be impervious to the friendly sun-beams; we should have a perpetual night; or, at best, but a sombre day. Were it more dense and humid, it would resemble the ocean—a medium too gross for us—and we should be incapable of respiration; or, were it more rarified and dry, the effect would be the same, and we should find ourselves—only to a greater extent—like travellers on the tops of the highest mountains. Were it held in fierce agita-

tion, or in absolute stagnation, the consequence to us, and to all animal and vegetable life, would be fatal.

Suppose the entire loss of Water. Two-thirds of our globe are covered with this element. Were the quantity one-fourth more, it would overwhelm nearly the whole world; were it one-fourth less, many parts would, probably, be parched, and all materially injured. Some of the ancient philosophers thought, that all things had been made from water. We cannot, indeed, fail to remark the dependence of animals and vegetables, upon this colorless and tasteless fluid. It is a curious fact, that a great part of the weight, both of animals and vegetables, consists of water. We could no more do without water, than without air. The total absence of this fluid, from our world, would render it an utterly unfit place for life of any kind; no fish or fowl, no animal or plant could possibly survive. And as to ourselves, we should possess no means of ablution; of cleansing our persons, linen, or habitations; of preparing much of our food,—even supposing food attainable; of compounding many of our most valuable medicines; of pursuing a great number of our necessary avocations; of allaying our thirst:—our existence would be insupportable from a variety of causes.

Suppose, finally, the total loss of Fire. The uses of this element, like those of air and water, are exceedingly numerous and important. It was formerly conjectured, that heat generated whatever exists. Its direct and indirect importance to all Nature, is at once apparent to the reflecting mind. "The only idea, probably," says Paley, "which this term raised in the reader's mind was, that of fire melting metals, resins, and some other substances; fluxing ores, running glass, and assisting us in many of our operations, chymical or culinary. Now, these are only uses of an occasional kind, and give us a very imperfect notion of what fire does for us. The grand importance of this dissolving

power, the great office indeed of fire in the economy of Nature, is keeping things in a state of solution, that is to say, in a state of fluidity. Were it not for the presence of heat, or of a certain degree of it, all fluids would be frozen. The ocean itself would be a quarry of ice, universal nature stiff and dead. We see, therefore, that the elements bear not only a strict relation to the constitution of organized bodies, but a relation to each other. Water could not perform its office to the earth without air; nor exist, as water, without fire.”<sup>1</sup>

9. There are many circumstances of our globe which shew, that it was designed to be an abode of life,—a place where animal and vegetable natures might exist for a time. There is a perceptible relation between every thing existing and that by which it exists; between every nature and that which supports it. There is *provision* in the strictest sense of the term, and to a wonderful extent. Means exist—independent of ourselves—to afford *us*, in particular, ten thousand conveniences and comforts,—to make this world suitable and desirable, as a temporary habitation. Suppose an opposite arrangement. Had, for instance, the surface of the world been an entire stone, or a vast continent of mud;—as smooth as glass, or as rugged as a rock;—covered with water, or altogether without it;—productive of nothing, or productive only in a slight degree:—in either alternative, *we* could not have been its inhabitants.

But, there are three or four things connected with the motion and position of the earth, in relation to the sun, which, when understood, discover exquisite contrivance. First, in performing its revolution round the central body, it describes very nearly a circle. This is not necessarily the case,—accident could hardly have produced it:—and, had our orbit been either an elongated

<sup>1</sup> Natural Philosophy.



ellipsis—or eccentric, like that of a comet—the contrast of temperatures would have been so great, at different periods of the year, that the same constitutions, whether animal or vegetable, could not sustain the change. Secondly.—If the earth, in performing its annual revolution, had its poles either parallel with the plane of its orbit, or perpendicular to its centre, the one half of it would be perpetually scorched, and the other frozen. To prevent both these evils, an inclination of its axis towards the plane of its orbit, of about twenty-three degrees and a half, has been appointed. By this appointment, every part of the earth's surface is illumined and warmed, in succession, from the equator to the poles, and we enjoy the grateful variety of the four seasons of the year. Thirdly.—The daily rotation of our globe, on its axis, before the sun, can be accounted for by no known law of Nature. Its utility, we can readily perceive, in the relief which is afforded to the earth and to all sensitive existence: but, whence its origin?—whence its continuance? It may be attempted, to account for our annual course, by the law of gravity,—although we can no more conceive, how the attracting power of a larger body should produce the revolution about itself, of a smaller, than we can comprehend, how one body possesses a power, at all, to draw another towards it—both bodies being at a vast distance apart—or in what that power consists. But this law of gravity will serve, in no way, to account for the phenomenon of alternate day and night. Surely, there is something here, which indicates the hand of an invisible and intelligent Power. “Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.” Fourthly.—The permanency and precision of the above motions cannot fail to beget wonder and admiration in the mind of every person, who makes them subjects of intelligent contemplation. Were the earth arrested in its annual revolution round the sun, or in its daily rotation on its



axis, disorder and ruin would inevitably and immediately ensue;—we should no more enjoy the “varied year,” nor say again,

“Sweet is the breath of morn  
And sweet the coming on of grateful evening mild;”

or, were its course retarded in either, the present order of nature would speedily be reversed; we should have the climate of Christmas in our present summer months; and our hours of repose would take the place of our hours of activity. We have here, then, a twofold perpetual motion, combined with wonderful regularity, and displaying a wisdom of contrivance and a power of execution, exceeding all our conceptions.

10. The human body is a microcosm of wonders. There is no piece of mechanical contrivance known, in which we can trace a resemblance to it, or by which it may be illustrated. The more we examine its structure and functions, the more we admire the excellence of the workmanship, and the beauty of contrivance, which present themselves in every part, and which continually shew the hand of omniscience. The most ingenious of human inventions, when viewed with the animal frame, indicate a poverty of contrivance, which cannot fail to humble the pretensions of the sons of men. From the head to the feet, the members are all admirably proportioned, related, and adapted; there is, generally, no deformity, deficiency, or superfluity; there is great strength with great delicacy, great capacity with very simple means. The numerous members and delicate organs, both external and internal, which compose the living machine, cannot fail to command the admiration of every intelligent beholder. In fact, it requires the knowledge of a well-instructed anatomist, to form a competent estimate of the complicated and delicate parts, which go to make up the entire human body; and the hand of the same learned person is neces-

sary, to describe the exquisite contrivance which every part displays.

A considerable volume would be necessary to contain all that might be written, on any principal part of our bodies. The eye, the ear, the hand, the foot, would be an ample and interesting subject of discussion, were we able and disposed to illustrate the design—with a view to utility—which exists in its structure. We shall merely observe, that every member and organ has its office, that no one can properly perform the office of another, that each is adequate to its own functions, that the whole could not lose a part, without deformity and inconvenience. And if a man can survey himself, his head and trunk; his arms and legs; his heart and lungs; his bones, joints, muscles, and nerves; his powers of digestion and nutrition; and, afterwards, contend, that an intelligent and a benevolent power had nothing to do with his formation, there would be no end to his objections, whatever illustrations of design, or proofs of contrivance, in himself, we could present to his notice, or press upon his attention. We think it beyond controversy, that the eyes were *designed* for sight, the ears for receiving sounds, the tongue for articulation, the teeth for mastication, the nose for distinguishing scents, the lungs for respiration, and so forth.

11. Instinct is a property, or law, of the nature of animals, which governs them for their own preservation, and so forth, without instruction or experience. It may consist in aversion or desire; it may be found in a greater or a less degree; it may be more or less acute; but there is no animal life without animal instinct. Our business, however, lies more with the utility of this property, or law, than with its philosophy; with its relation, than with its origin. When we see the bee constructing its cell, and collecting and depositing its honey, against a time of scarcity; or the ant preparing a granary, and filling it with treasures of supply, for the necessities of a future day; or the bird

building its nest, in a secure place, and with materials which combine security with ease, a suitable receptacle for its eggs and young; we say, that all this is done from instinct; that is, it is the inherent inclination of the bee, the ant, and the bird, thus to act; and in so doing, they only follow their inclination. Now the question is, whether this inherent inclination, or appetency, was superadded to the nature of these little creatures, to induce this conduct,—to lead to these results. We believe the affirmative; and here we trace design, contrivance, the relation of means to ends.

Let us endeavour to place this subject in a still clearer light. As soon as a water-fowl escapes from the shell, it rushes into the water; as soon as a land-bird is sufficiently fledged, it begins to employ its wings, to raise itself into the air; as soon as a new-born infant is turned towards its mother's breast, it endeavours after the nipple. Now, is it not instinct, that moves and directs in all these cases? Is it not genuine nature that is obeyed in each of them? And is there not in all an adaptation of means to ends? Why does not the water-fowl endeavour after the air? Evidently, because that is not its element; and its structure proves that it is fitted to swim, rather than to fly. Why does not the land-bird attempt the water? Clearly, because that is not congenial to it; and were it to venture beyond the depth of its legs, it would pay dearly for its temerity. And why does not the infant long for the water, or the air, rather than for the milk; and endeavour to swim, or to fly, rather than to suck? Just for this reason, that it is *designed* neither for the water, nor the air; but to repose on its mother's bosom, and to live and thrive on the nutriment which she is able and delighted to impart.

12. But, it may be conceded, that there is design in all the above examples; and yet denied, that it originated with an intelligent Designer. It arose in some other way! Now, to expose the folly of an hypothesis, it is



often necessary to adduce another, equally foolish. If we beheld a well-executed painting, or an exquisite piece of statuary, or a complicated machine, our second feeling would be admiration of the ingenuity and ability of the author. The idea could not enter our minds, that the painting had always existed; or, that the colors had accidentally met and blended, so as to produce the numerous and diverse objects represented, with all the lights and shades, and the striking effects of the whole; nor could we be induced to believe, that the marble had lain in the quarry from eternity, in the form presented, or that a detached fragment, or a number of fragments, had assumed the peculiar shape, the symmetrical proportions, and the delicate and beautiful features, of themselves, and without the intelligent mind and the forming hand of an artist; nor could we be persuaded, that the numerous limbs of the curiously-wrought machine had formed themselves out of their respective materials, and taken their relative positions, so as to co-operate and produce what we perceive to be the result. Should the highest authority in the world, audaciously attempt to palm upon us such impossibilities, as facts, we should treat them as they deserved. And will it be pretended, that all which the creation presents to the eye of a philosopher, or even to the eye of a clown, was without a beginning, had no intelligent author, and is purely the result of a fortunate contingency? No painting, no statuary, no machine in the world, is comparable with the frame of nature, or with many of its least considerable parts.



"through Nature, up to Nature's God." As a moral truth, there is nothing to be compared with it, when duly apprehended, for restraining or stimulating human conduct; for appalling the vicious or animating the virtuous of mankind. And, indeed, it is the fulcrum, on which the moral Archimedes must fix his lever, if he would impart any valuable and permanent impulse to his fellow-creatures, in the direction of their own highest interests.

3. The Creator of the world is likely to be its Governor. The latter relation does not necessarily, (so far as we know), arise from the former: but, they who believe, that there is a Great Being sustaining the one, will hardly disbelieve, that he bears the other. As order, in the material world, supposes laws, by which that order is established and preserved; and laws, again, implies a law-giver, by whom they are appointed and upheld: so, a moral constitution would seem to make laws necessary; and these, again, a moral Governor, who has instituted, and administers them; and who holds us accountable to himself. By analogy, we infer, that He who sustains and directs the whole machinery of external Nature—matter of whatever kind, or however modified—by the agency of second causes, embraces, also, within the limits of his wide dominion, the hearts and lives of his intelligent creatures, whom he has appointed to be influenced by reflection—by the feeling of right and wrong—by a sense of dissatisfaction and uneasiness in evil practices; and the reverse, in virtuous courses. The philosopher, in looking abroad, beholds the operation of the active principles of Nature; and by self-introspection, he will discover the effects of what we will venture to call, the forces of a moral constitution.

4. It is impossible to disconnect from our idea of God, relations sustained towards us; and while these relations secure benefits, they imply and impose reciprocal

human character, when he said, "Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him."

But there may be some persons atheists, or inclining to atheism, who are exceptions to the above: their minds are unhinged; but they are yet candid and courteous; conscious of their liability to mistake, ready to listen, and open to conviction. They have thought much, read much, conversed much—are not wholly destitute of solicitude, at times, about their unpopular opinions—cannot avow with the same oracular confidence as some, their dissent from every thing like religious opinion—and, now and then sigh out, with one of old; What is truth? We have all along hoped that our brief statements, should they fall under their notice, might prove of service to individuals of this class. Such persons are, in our apprehension, like a man who has fallen, or is falling, into a vortex, and will soon be lost, unless rescued. We see them sinking, the waters will soon close upon them!—but even in the jaws of death, they are not awake to their danger; nay, they flatter themselves with safety! This situation of the utmost peril, as we believe, awakens a thousand inexpressible sympathies in our bosoms, towards their destiny; and every view and thought of it, only deepens, to an intense degree, our anxiety for their deliverance.

2. An able writer has said, "It is an immense confession, that there is a God." The importance of the conclusion arises not so much from its difficulty, as from its practical utility. As a speculative truth, it must be assumed in all philosophical investigations, or the student of Nature will be the victim of perplexities, without end. It must be the terminating point in all his inquiries,—the last link in his chain of causes and effects,—the great invisible centre of emanation, whence proceed all the phenomena, which awaken his curiosity, and engage and exhaust his powers. He must travel

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obligations. A Creator, it will be admitted, has a propriety in the things, or persons, created; and may demand their appropriation. A righteous sovereign will exercise his office for the good of his subjects, and has a right to expect their homage. A benevolent master will care for his domestics, and look for fidelity and diligence in his service. And, a wise and good parent will provide for his offspring, and expect, in return, filial love and obedience. Now, assuming, that there is a God (which, indeed, cannot be denied, without assuming the most monstrous things conceivable,) he bears towards us all, these important characters and relations; performs for us all, these high offices; and demands of us corresponding behaviour.

5. We may justly suppose it a primary duty we owe to God, to inquire for him amongst his works. To make known himself—his being and perfections—was, probably, one of the high ends of the creation. And to view his works, regardless of this end, is to dishonour him and ourselves. They are to be sought out; and he is to be sought out in them. Without impressive and assuring convictions of the fact of the Divine existence, religion cannot exist amongst men; and, every effort to perform religious worship, to cherish religious affections, and, in short, to observe the numerous and incumbent duties of a religious life, will prove as vain and ineffectual, as an attempt to give solidity to a shadow, or animation to a corpse. The least lurking scepticism on this point, renders a man as morally incapable of religious emotions, as wood or stone. And, to review the evidences, from Nature, of a creating and presiding Deity, may reprove the unbelief of some, and confirm the faith of others. No person will regret the expenditure of a small portion of time, or attention, in looking into a subject, worthy of a seraph's powers; and as profitable, as it is high and splendid. To contemplate Nature, is always a pleasing exercise to a person of



intelligence and taste; but, to view it with the eye of a religious philosopher, is to feel wonder and admiration, at the displays which it makes of the Divine perfections; and the closer the inspection, the more will he wonder and admire.

"He sees with other eyes than theirs. Where they

Behold a *Sun*, he views a Deity:

What makes them only smile, makes him adore." 1

6. The Deity may be supposed to require, that we should be solicitous to know his will concerning our duty to himself, and to each other. To be dutiful is to be virtuous. All duty implies obligation; and obligation, a knowledge of that to which we are obliged. In the absence of this knowledge, omission can, under a righteous government, involve no guilt. Could an offender prove his entire ignorance of the law, against which he has committed offence, after employing all the means within his power to obtain information, his offence should subject him to no punishment. What degree of knowledge, of obligation and duty, in a religious and moral point of view, some of mankind possess, it may be difficult to say; but there are none who can plead absolute ignorance, in these respects. Where will be found the man, who can sincerely declare his total ignorance of all duty, both to his Maker and to his fellows? And, where can be found the individual, who can excuse himself for many things, which he does, or for many which he leaves undone? A consciousness of offence is common to mankind. Every man feels within his bosom, that he is without excuse, in many things which he allows himself. There is such a thing as the light of nature; only by this, we would be understood to mean, the knowledge which man might attain, by natural means, rather than that which they have, at any time, actually possessed.

In reference to many things, this light of nature shines

1 Night Thoughts. Night VIII.

but dimly, because it was never intended to be exclusive and final. And whatever perception of right and wrong, of personal and relative duties, exists in the human mind, left to its entire guidance, must be hypothetical and inferential. There never was, perhaps, a period of time, in which the inhabitants of the world were wholly abandoned to this light. A friendly ray, from some superior source, always lent its directive aid to their bewildered and distracted minds. We see this light, although perverted, in the ancient pagan superstitions; and more clearly, in the refined speculations of Socrates and Plato, or in the ethical dogmas of Epicurus and Seneca. We must be allowed, however, to suspect, that these learned men were indebted to unacknowledged authorities, for many hints which are contained in their writings, or which suggested what they have written. They tasted other than Castalian dews. They felt and acknowledged their own ignorance, and admitted the necessity of a Divine Instructor. There is reason to believe, that they would have received with gladness, any well-authenticated revelation from the "Father of Lights," had such been vouchsafed.

And here we would venture to recommend to attention the book, which the greatest philosophers, scholars, antiquaries, chronologists and critics have thankfully and exultingly received, as a Divine Revelation. We can assure the sceptic, that the pretensions of the Bible rest on no narrow and feeble basis. It is easy to censure and ridicule a volume, which we have never read, and with whose merits or demerits we are not personally and intimately acquainted; but it is disingenuous and dishonourable, too. And, to read it, with a mind pre-occupied with deep and determined prejudice, amounts to a moral disqualification to appreciate its importance. It requires no small degree of hardihood and recklessness, in any man, or class of men, petulantly to reject a volume, which the wisest and the greatest

have pressed to their hearts, as the richest boon to mortals ; which has been a "light to their path," and a lantern to their steps ;" and which alone sheds a ray upon the darkness of the grave. This is not the place to discuss the evidences of the Bible ; but, we entreat the reader to examine its contents, with the spirit of a man, who is in search of important truth.

7. We may, finally, suppose, that God requires us to worship him. By worship, in this connection, we mean the feelings and practices which creatures, in our circumstances, natural and moral, owe to Him, in whom we live, and move, and have our being ; and to whom we are ever held accountable. This worship is the supreme end and happiness of all intelligent and moral natures. An atheist would tell us, that he worships Nature. We confess our ignorance of his meaning. What does he mean by Nature?—and what, by the worship of Nature? Are we to understand, that he respects, venerates, adores the elements, or any one of them?—our globe, or the other globes which revolve in infinite space? What is this, but to put the creature in the place of the Creator,—to transfer that honour to an effect which is due to its cause,—to make a God for himself, that he may worship him, as suits his convenience or taste? The principle of all worship is contained and enforced in these words:—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy mind, with all thy strength ; and thy neighbour as thyself." And where this principle warms, expands, and stimulates the affections of an individual, the worship will be as far from drudgery, as from fear ; and the worshipper will not demand to be made acquainted with the nature of God, or expect to comprehend all that may be difficult in his providential and moral arrangements, before he will bow down to the Most High ; or rising, exclaim, "*This God is our God, for ever.*"

THE END.









